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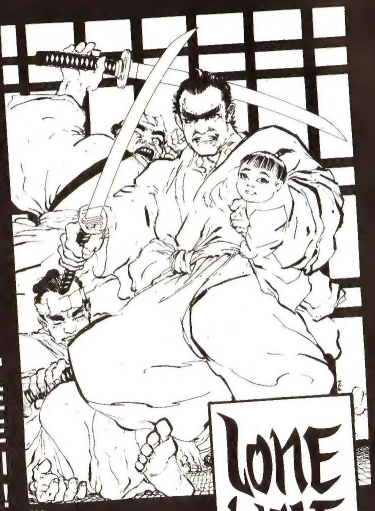

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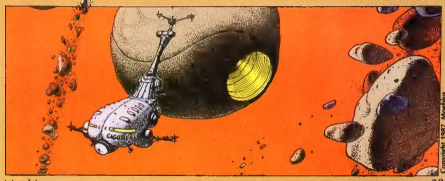

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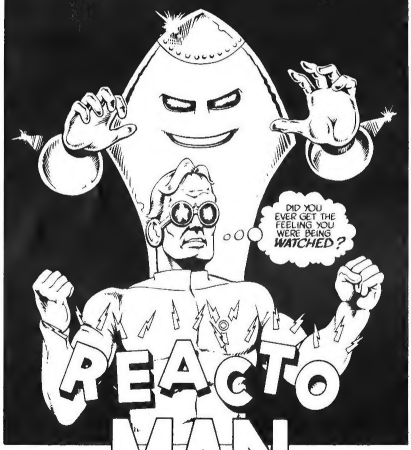

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point blank

We recently received a very interesting letter from Dale Crain, art director of **Amazing Heroes** and **The Comics Journal.** The purpose of Dale's letter was to provide us with constructive critism, both artistic and editorial in nature. Amidst many helpful suggestions was one very important point that he has brought to our attention: Various people have found **Four Color** to be editorially unfocused. Clearly, the time has come to define the magazine.

Dale provided a list outlining the purposes of other publications dealing with comics. Specifically, he cited that **Comics Interview** provided interviews; **Comics Feature** panders to "fanboy zombies" and the younger Marvel market; **Comics Journal** "attempts to separate the art from the trash in comics;" **Amazing Heroes** is "pretty well rounded dealing with today's comics fans;" and finally, **The Comics Buyer's Guide** is a quick source for news.

And that leaves us.

While this may not come as the greatest revelation, **Four Color** is what the others are not. We are a pro-industry, full service magazine. If readers enjoy 72 pages of editorial comment, solid interviews or light news laced with ads, they certainly have other outlets for it. In this regard, we admit, we are pretty much a middle-of-the-road publication in that we avoid going to an extreme in any one of these directions. We pride ourselves in being well-rounded.

Since we are a pro-industry magazine, our purpose is to promote comics by showcasing the best examples. However, this does not imply that we are nothing more than a glossy house organ. Far from it. While we print largely positive articles on the comics field, critical comments do find their way into our pages. These critical comments do not appear solely to be critical, they are published to be constructive. Part of our responsibility as being a pro-industry magazine is to spotlight weaknesses and problems so they can be resolved.

Illustration By Frank Cammuso

We view ourselves as the **Newsweek** of the comics scene.

We regularly publish a complete overview of what is happening in the world of comic books. By doing so we appeal to both pros and fans while not having to cater to either group exclusively. This allows our content to be very flexible.

For example, like **Newsweek** we are able to present a viewpoint that differs from that of the editorial staff. Last issue featured Tom Heintjes' "Up Front," a guest editorial that opposed comics labeling. Also in the same issue we invited a noted graphic artist outside the comics world to critique the state of comic book covers and suggest how they could be better designed. We also ran a feature article on fan-favorite **ElfQuest.** These, combined with our regular news coverage and reviews make for a true full service magazine.

Perhaps one of our most important purposes is to help legitimize the comic book industry, especially in the eyes of the public at large. We achieve this through our graphic presentation, strong content and glossy package. **Four Color** is the sort of magazine comic fans would be comfortable showing to non-comics readers.

Ultimately, **Four Color** is for comic book connoisseurs. This is our way of saying that the magazine can be picked up and enjoyed by anyone who enjoys comics.

—David Caruba
Brandon Twine
April, 1987

F
C

By Tom Heintjes

up front

The cynical elite in comics by now have taken a lingering look at DC's new editorial guidelines and said, *Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.* Oh, for that devil-may-care attitude. These new guidelines are potentially more threatening than the Comics Code's atrophied set of attitudes, born of the hysteria of the 1950s.

Those who have been perusing the fan press have no doubt noticed that Frank Miller's name has been cropping up in opposition to DC's move.

It's easy to see why Frank Miller (who, after **Dark Night's** success, has a mile of neck to stick out for his beliefs) is rankled; under the new DC guidelines, he would be prevented from exploring many of the themes that earmark much of his work such as extreme violence—balletic though it may be—social decadence (such as drug use) and extramarital sex, to name a few. It's like DC said in its policy: "We will avoid excessive levels of violent behavior and excessively detailed depictions of violence." It's a safe bet Miller couldn't have created his original sting on **Daredevil** under these guidelines, without his work falling prey to the grey area ambiguously labelled "controlled distribution."

(I did find one of Miller's remarks peculiar, though. In the December 19th editorial in **C.B.G.**, Miller writes that censorship in general, and the Comics Code specifically, don't breed stories of pride, honor and courage, and that the Code in fact prohibits these values. I would direct Miller to practically the entire body of work of Jack Kirby, whose work I know Miller admires, and whose work under the Code uses those same values as their moral underpinnings. I don't point this out as an advocate of the Code, Heaven forfend—I do it to show that the Code isn't the only culprit that has given comics its inglorious legacy.)

But as vehement as Miller was in his argument against allowing the Moral

Illustration By Richard Hilliard

Majority to coerce the industry into collaring itself, Alan Moore proceeded to the next logical step. In the February 13th **C.B.G.**, he announced his intention of leaving DC after his contract expires, unless the publisher's stance liberalizes. Moore made the most sensible presentation of the argument against the restrictions: the personal responsibility of parents to their children. Moore resides in Britain, so the concept of the influential religious right is literally a foreign one to him, and I find it hard to blame him for packing it in. To our modern minds, we are hard-pressed to believe the story of Rasputin—how could the government of an entire nation be held under the capricious sway of an ignorant, gnome-like peasant faith healer? Yet, to foreigners, America must look frighteningly similar.

I suspect that Moore's proclamation will insight fandom's opposition to DC's move like the guidelines themselves did not. (Self-interest has a way of doing that; the implementation of the guidelines might have been "nebulous," as Jan Strnad wrote in **C.B.G.** #690, until the result in the d-Moore-alization of the industry.) And since it's a safe bet that Moore won't work for Marvel—he has publically said he'd sooner starve—we'd better look for him to pop up at the independents, or not at all. Moore's proclamation also underscores an implicit point in the whole debate—the creators who are rebelling against the guidelines are **freelancers,** and have to play by management's rules or not play at all. Rarely has it been so starkly highlighted that creators work under the conditions the company wishes them to. If they don't like it, they can pack up and go home. Humph.

Unlike Moore and Miller, Jan Strnad, another respected writer, said he wasn't as upset by the guidelines as he had expected to be, citing the vagueness of the wording and the interpretive windows they leave open. He also makes an important, albeit cynical, point that had previously not been pointed out, probably due to decorum: Are creators more concerned with the new DC Realism for the sake of their craft, or out of concern that comic books without sexploitation, "moral degeneracy" (or at least what the Robert E. Buttses of the world consider to be moral degeneracy) and unbridled destruction will result in lower sales and smaller royalty checks? Some creators will find the implications offensive, undoubtedly, but I'm glad to see that someone with some stature in the industry addressed the question.

In **Journal** #113, Miller again takes the high ground, stressing the responsibility of parents, and in the process he uttered the phrase that strikes fear into the heart of Evangelists: the First Amendment. Fortunately for creative

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people, the First Amendment protects intellectual and literary freedom of expression, just as it does political expression. (In a 1774 letter to the inhabitants of Quebec, the Continental Congress expounded its feeling that "the importance of [freedom of the press] consists, besides the advancement of truth, science, morality, and the arts in general, in its diffusion of liberal sentiments on the administration of government. . . .")

Unfortunately for creative people, conversely, it's **people** who interpret the First Amendment, and when one considers the fact that it's "people" like William Rehnquist who sit atop the Supreme Court, these are dark times. **Some** people find **some** things **so** offensive that others shouldn't be permitted to express those things. (Here in Atlanta, where I live, such a situation recently arose. A group of 20,000 civil-rights marchers held a huge rally in nearby Forsyth County, which doesn't permit blacks to live there. When the rally was held, it was generally acknowledged that it was a noble, progressive step forward in race relations, and the march came off without a hitch. However, the Ku Klux Klan now wants their turn to stage a rally in Forsyth, and it's taking a real intellectual force of will around here to consider such a march permissible under the First Amendment.)

Today, the First Amendment is broad and literary censorship is unconstitutional, and comic books are certainly afforded the same protection as any prestigious newspaper. (The Code is a regulatory body, which is a polite way to say "censors," but it's different because it's imposed from within, and could be dissolved at will by the publishers—DC and Marvel allow that organization to exist merely by adhering to it.) Over the years, the mass media have taken some lumps for their portrayal of violence, and for the theoretical effects of that portrayal on society. Studies about the causal links between media violence and behavioral violence haven't been conclusive, but facts have never deterred the Moral Majority before and it's unlikely that the situation will change. Even the "million dollar" set of studies paid for by the U. S. Office of the Surgeon General in 1969-71 led to this hardly absolute conclusion: that television **might** serve to stimulate violence in **certain** people viewing under **certain** conditions.

A look at Japan's situation is instructive. Japan has become a prominent exporter of television cartoon shows that are quite violent, and its samurai / ninja films and television programs can be unbelievably violent, with severed limbs and slashed bodies cluttering the screen. This situation has resulted in protests and even government debates over the "super abundance" of violence that Japanese audiences, including children, have access to. Yet Japan's crime rate is the lowest of any major country, which stokes the fire of the controversy over the relationship between media violence and societal violence. It's an argument against media controls, to be sure.

It's news to no one that the Code isn't the only media control. Films are ed by censors before distribution, and typically one of three things happens: Material that is judged to be unusually violent is left on the cutting-room floor, the film is given a more restrictive rating, or it is banned. Film studios know this going in, and they know that there will be a certain audience, with certain predilections, ready to attend the movie, according to its rating.

This arrangement works fine for the film industry, according to Strnad's letter in **C.B.G.** #690, so why all the fuss about a similar system for comics? Implementation, for one—it's mandatory that a parent accompany a small child to see a PG-13 or R-rated movie; would the comics industry force parents to saunter down to the specialty shop to pick up a similarly rated comic book? And if so, the consumer buying structure of the market would likely change. How many parents would trudge down to the shop **every week** to see what the new shipment contained? Not many, I'd bet.

Yet, in its theoretical form, a ratings system **isn't** an inherently bad or criminal idea, as many C.B.G. correspondents would have us think. It works here for the movies (and how many comics creators would turn down an opportunity to work in films?), and many other creatively produced products in Europe are under a ratings system, and the United State's comics industry hasn't exactly left the Europeans eating our dust. The problem lies with the way such a system would be handled and the purpose of a ratings system. DC's ratings system isn't being implemented to diversify the audience, or to alert older readers that this particular book might be more to their liking, or to alert younger children that this one might strike their fancy. It's being implemented in a fearful atmosphere out of defensiveness, which is all wrong.

Beyond the guidelines, the protests and the uncertainty of DC's move, one thing that the dreamers among us often forget, has been made clear: that for all the much talked-about advances in printing, distribution, reputation and content, comic books are still a business. Here and there, in the isolated pockets of the direct-sales market, it's an art form, but lest readers think that the industry's Renaissance has truly arrived, the fear and insecurity that has always found a willing home with comics publishers has weighted down the hopes we had and dragged us back to Earth. Apparently, we have no right to be anywhere else.

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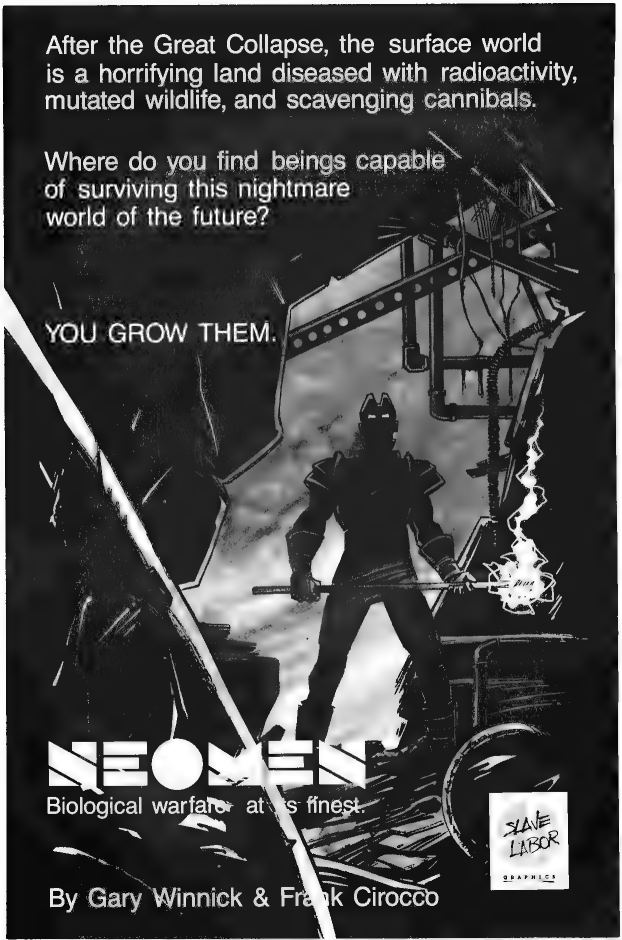
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letters

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Editing duties for this section are shared by the staff, who try and prefer to print letters in their entirety, when possible. A complete address cannot be printed unless the writer requests it to appear.

All letters should be addressed to **Four Color** Magazine, P.O. Box 1146, Maplewood, NJ 07040.

Strange Similarities In Timeline?

G. E. Schlegelmilch
Rowland Heights, CA 91748-2134

Dear Four-Colorites:

First off, compliments on the fine magazine. I like the approach you are taking very much. I just hope you can maintain the high level of quality you've set for yourselves. Good writing, good art, and good production. Who could ask for anything more?

Seeing as you asked for reviews and comments, I can't let this go by. In your News and Opinion column in issue #3, you had a section titled "Blackthorne Goes to Color" and mentioned several upcoming titles. Truth to tell, I thought the article was an April Fool gag at first, due to the similarities my wife and I saw in the descriptions of the coming releases and many of the current books on the stands.

The **Bringers** reminded me of the Guardians of the Universe in DC's **Green Lantern,** as both were races who could channel the forces of the universe in their bodies. The resemblance continued with **Omega Elite,** the same type of intergalactic based-in-space police force as the Green Lantern Corps.

Then there comes **Locke,** "the adventures of an intergalactic angel of death who performs much-needed assassinations in the name of the space-time continuum and is commanded by a mysterious 'Council of Death.' " Seems to me that First Comics' **Nexus** has the intergalactic-assassin-receiving his-"orders"-from-a-mysterious-source market pretty well sewn up.

Another resemblance found was **XL,** a rich kid who finds himself hooked to a full bionics system. That too sounds familiar, like a very brief description of Comics Interview's **MICRA.**

Here too is **Wind Rage,** a special secret agent with martial arts expertise and has a bionic arm. Any relation to Misty Knight, former cop, now private eye, with martial arts training and a bionic arm? She was a supporting character in Marvel's **Iron Fist** and **Power Man/Iron Fist.**

Lastly was **Operative Scorpio.** This comparison, my wife made almost as fast as I did, and she has no claims on being an expert. Seems that this character is one man, but three men, kinda like Marvel's **Moon Knight.** The major players in the strip are rich man Aristotle Andropolis (Steven Grant), policeman Morgan Pierce (cabbie Jake Lockley), and weapons master Jay-Daniel Cobra (mercenary Marc Spector).

Maybe I'm reading the coming plot synopses the wrong way. I'm by no means accusing anyone of anything. But you have to admit, there seems to be an awful lot of coincidences for just one article. The irony of this article is the issue it appears in, the cover feature is on "Upholding the Copyrights." Outrageous!

We wonder if you are, perhaps, jumping the gun a bit here. Why not at least sample the Timeline titles when they come out before labeling them copies?

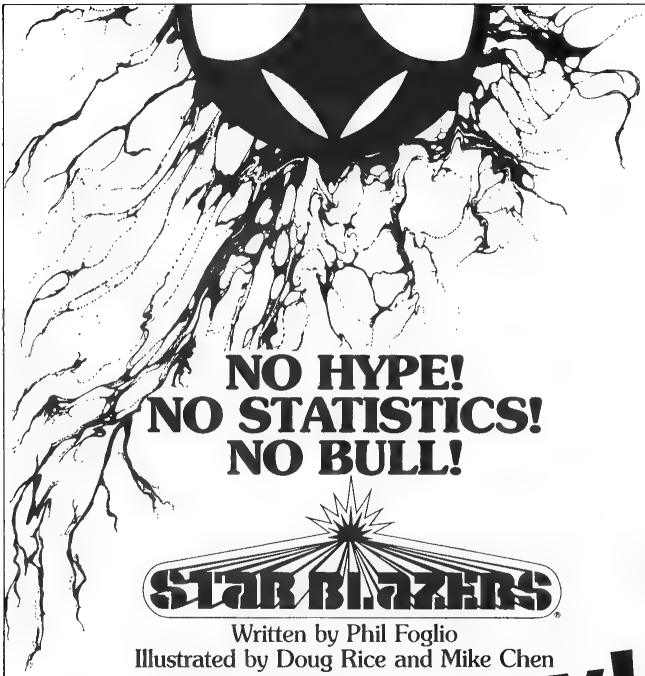
Dropping the Ball

David Walton
Mountain View, MO 65548

Dear Mr. Caruba,

As a charter subscriber I always enjoy **Four Color** but I was disappointed in the article in issue #3 about Marvel's copyright lawyers. When I received the magazine in the mail today, I opened it expecting to at least read mention of the Kirby-Marvel controversy, but there was nary a word. Sorry folks but on this article you dropped the ball.

In fact if there is one weakness with **Four Color** it is the fact you try to be



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so fair to all sides that you come across as bland and passionless. Fault the **Comics Journal** though you may for being too loud mouthed and opinionated, at least it has life. Too often **Four Color's** work comes across as bland and tepid, though beautifully packaged.

When is **Four Color** going to tackle the Kirby-Marvel-**Comics Journal** controversy, no holds barred? There is a lot to cover. The ethics of withholding Kirby's artwork. Kirby's demand for some recognition in co-creating much of the Marvel universe. Marvel's lawyers side of the story, never before published. The possible threat to Marvel's copyright claims. Is the **Comics Journal** exploiting the issue for it's own self interest? What does Marvel lose by giving Kirby his work?

Come on folks, pick up the ball. Adult coverage of comics is **not** bland coverage in a pretty package. Nor does investigative or controversial work mean you must be like the **Comics Journal.** But it does mean challenging your readers, not just spoon-feeding them.

The article you attack, "Upholding The Copyright," was intended as an overview of how Marvel protects their characters. It was not intended to address, as you put it, the Jack Kirby/Marvel dispute. To begin with, Marvel's attorney, Steve Sheffler, was not involved in the dispute and would not have been in a position to discuss it. However, we agree with you over how important the Kirby/Marvel dispute is to the comics industry as a whole. Next issue will feature a guest editorial (as opposed to, say, a few paragraphs in the "Copyright" article) by one of the principles involved in the controversy.

After running articles on Steve Ditko and Jon Muth, as well as (Friendly) Frank Mangiaracina in this issue, we find your charge of us being "bland and passionless" to be abstract and unfair. Would you care to be a little more specific?

At least we don't make it a policy of force-feeding our opinions down our readers' throats when not warranted.

Less Than Opus

John R. Cochran
New York, N.Y. 10024

Dear Mr. Caruba:

Gawd! A seven-page opus on copyrighting comics and nary a mention of Captain Marvel's problems with Superman.

Yow! If any of the attorneys at Marvel had been involved in the Captain Marvel/Superman problems of the early 70s, our seven page opus could have been an eight page extravaganza.

Some Insight on Ditko

catherine yronwode
Editor-In-Chief
Eclipse Comics
Forestville, CA 95463

Dear **Four Color—**

Nice article on Steve Ditko by Will Murray, but for the record, Ditko is from Johnstown, Pennsylvania, not Philadelphia. His brother and two sisters still live there and Steve is still very close to them. In fact, it seems his devotion to his family is an important part of his life that most would-be Ditko-ologists ignore. Every few months he travels to Johnstown to stay with his relatives, while continuing to draw and write.

In my research on Ditko, i spoke to his brother Pat and to a couple of his ex-schoolmates. From them i learned that Steve and his best friend used to dress up as Batman and Robin (Steve was the Batman, as might be expected) and that the entire Ditko family enjoyed comics. Steve's father's favorite was Hal Foster's **Prince Valiant** and Steve, in addition to **Batman,** followed Will Eisner's **Spirit.** Every week he walked across town to the newsstand that carried the Philadelphia papers to buy the **Spirit** insert. Dr. Strange's window is a testimony to this influence, for it is based on Denny Colt's window, a circle with four curved bars cutting across it at odd, changeable angles.

According to one of Ditko's classmates, Steve was a "shy" but "very bright" child. Because his father was a lower middle class worker – a master carpenter in a steel mill – Steve was put into the "vocational" (as opposed to the "academic") track in school. This arrangement was typical of the economic rather than ability-oriented decisions made by school authorities of the period. The result was that Ditko and his classmates took wood shop classes instead of chemistry and were expected to become day laborers.

Ditko's friend broke this cycle of class-determinism by enrolling in summer school and forcing the authorities to move him into the "academic" program. At that point he saw no more of Steve. He is now a doctor, and he says that the system of education Steve and he endured was oppressive but that he was sure Steve was far too smart to have been held back by it. He had **no** idea that his ex-classmate was the co-creator of Spider-Man, but when i told him that was so, he was very pleased to hear that Ditko had made something of himself too.

Another classmate told me Ditko studied sign painting and would probably have taken that on as a career. Instead he went to Germany during the occupation after World War II, then came back and studied art under Jerry Robinson on the G.I. bill, (Jerry having been the Batman artist he'd admired as a child made this a natural step for Steve). In the mid-1950s Steve had a serious illness, possibly tuberculosis, which almost ended his comics career right after it started. (His first work, by the way, was for Joe Simon and Jack Kirby's company, but most fans call his Ajax-Farrell story "Stretching Things" his first published work – which it is not.)

Anyway, he recovered, and went on to the fame and glory of the early Marvel years. His stint at DC on **The Creeper** was cut short by another bout of what some people tell me was tuberculosis and Gil Kane took over the book for him before it bit the dust. I've met Steve, and i know he values his remoteness from fandom, but it's true – he **did** go to a convention in 1964. He even drew a con sketch for the program book! What turned him off to fandom i don't know. It may have been his deepening interest in Ayn Rand's philosophy; Rand also concealed details of her childhood and private life from her fans.

One final thing about Ditko – his brother painted a wonderful word-picture for me of Steve sitting in his oldest sister's house, drawing "Spider-Man" on a bread board in the kitchen while the family gathered for Sunday

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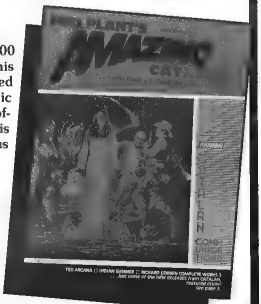

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dinner. I asked if Steve worked from any kind of scripts or notes by Stan Lee. "No," said Pat, "he'd just make up the stories there in the house with all of us there, and he'd write words in the margins for Stan Lee to use in the dialogue."

And that's the Steve Ditko i like most of all, the kid who dressed up as Batman and went on to produce one of America's most enduring fantasy heroes.

Thanks for your letter, Cat. We appreciate the time you put into adding to the Ditko article.

Ditko Downbeat and Various Views of Staff Reviews

Thomas J. Campbell
Madison, WI 53716

Dear **Four Color** staff,

I must echo all the other writers and tell you how impressed I am with your magazine. It's time somebody put out a quality magazine for comic book connoisseurs. Let's hope it lasts.

I found the article on Ditko to be rather downbeat, an almost vicious portrayal of the man. Is that the way you intended it to be or is the man really as isolated and cynical as the article suggests? And since we're on the subject of that article, I'd like to suggest that writer Will Murray distinctly label any personal opinions he includes as just that. Having collected **Rom** since the first issue, I resent him calling it a terrible title as if it were a fact. Will, this may surprise you, but there actually are people in the world who enjoyed **Rom** (as, I'm sure, there are people who enjoy **Chuck Norris**). It simply detracts from the effect of your article when you casually badmouth these titles.

Not being a viewer of the **Honeymooners** television show, I can't compare the comic to it. On it's own merits, though, I've decided not to collect the series. The characters, at least as Robert Loren Fleming portrays them, are simply unappealing to me. Also, intentionally or not, it seems as if the title is going to be coming out about as often as **Ms. Mystic.**

I totally agree with Jeff Kapalka's review of **Concrete.** As I write this, I have yet to see the first issue, but I have yet to see Paul Chadwick do a bad **Concrete** story. He's just gone out of his way to make the character so appealing and the stories so down to earth. I can only hope that **Concrete** will survive the black and white implosion, because this character is too good to lose.

I must disagree with Jeff on the subject of John Byrne's **Superman,** though. Jeff argues that one of the original strengths of the character was that he was the average guy who became a hero after being pushed too far. Perhaps that's true, but that's the way it's been for forty years. It's time for something new. I commend John for having the guts to remake a legend. I find the new Clark more believable and find that I can identify with him better than I could with the old one. I found the old one **too** wimpy and, consequently, he came off as being fake. He was simply a disguise that Superman would wear when he wasn't doing good deeds. In Byrne's **Superman,** it's Clark who puts on the costume and disguises himself as Superman. Byrne emphasizes the man, not the super.

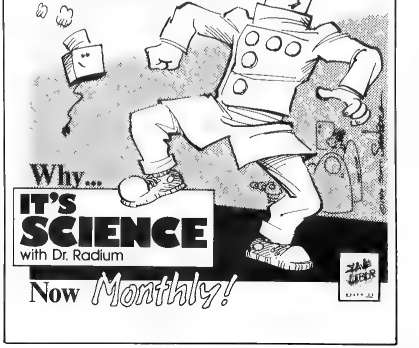
As for the books Joseph Cicala reviews under "Random Reactions," I've written enough to DC about the new **Justice League** and have no wish to go into it here. I've been enjoying **Thor** and will be sorry to see Walt leave the series. I don't read **Booster Gold.** I basically agree about **Shazam!,** but at least this Captain Marvel is preferable to the one in **Justice League.** I've recently stopped collecting **Alpha Flight.** Some of the events were interesting, but basically Bill Mantlo's writing has left a lot to be desired.

Blame The Distributors

Frank Maconochie
Address Withheld on Request

Dear David Caruba,

As an independent, foreign publisher who has distributed my



comic in the USA, I had to laugh at your editorial stance in issue #2 of **Four Colors.** I am sure that every publisher is aware of the damage to their credibility and sales when they don't release their publication on time So why does this happen? While artists and printers may have an effect on publishing deadlines, the main culprit is the distributor who withholds payment on orders which have been delivered.

Payments are usually arranged for 30 days on receival of goods and based on this expectation publishers will print on a monthly or bimonthly basis depending on their capital reserves. The printers won't print another issue until they have been paid for the previous order. So what do the publishers do when payments have not been received after 90 days?

Rather than break deadlines, they invest more money in the hope that back payments will eventually catch up with their out-goings. When this doesn't happen, the publisher goes broke.

As well as pointing out publisher's responsibilities, you could do the comic industry a unique service by providing publishers a hit list of distributors who have outstanding payments to publishers. Of course you couldn't do this, because you would be buried in law suits. It's just a whimsical idea. It's much safer for you to pick on publishers, after all they have always been the bad guys, until they get big enough to protect themselves then everyone fawns on them.

Capital City Distribution may reaffirm their 60 day provision, it's a pity they won't stick to their 30 day payment schedule. They currently owe this publisher over $800. Big deal, eh! But that is why you wont see a new issue of our comic.

As a fellow publisher, we echo your sentiments concerning direct-sales distributors. However, like any profession, there are good and bad ones. As we said in "Point Blank" last issue, it is a shame that the distributors who honor their payments can only be counted on one hand.

We wonder when the rest of the distributors will wise up and begin acting professionaly?

It is also interesting to note that while we have extended an invitation to all the distributors to answer to charges of late payments, none have come on the record. The invitation still stands.

Wolfman Fired For Speaking Out

Marv Wolfman
Address Withheld

And so it ends.

In a letter dated February 19, 1987, Dick Giordano wrote, "...this will serve as our formal notice of termination as it regards your editorial services on **The New Teen Titans** and **The New Teen Titans Spotlight On** (sic)."

For publicly speaking out against possible censorship, DC Comics, Inc. fired me as Creative Editor.

It is easy for me to say I am disappointed, but I am certainly not surprised. DC has made it policy to fire any editor or part-time editor who negatively comments on DC Policy in public. It is a shame that they feel they must rule through fear, for fear will stifle even in-house complaints from those editors and assistants who cannot so easily replace lost work as I. A company that does not encourage, or at least accept, differences of opinions on a subject that they themselves made public, puts itself in a position where they will lose the very talent they desperately sought and need.

What does this policy mean to you, the readers and the store owners? For the readers, it means you will not thrill to **Dark Knight** #5 or another Frank Miller project. You will not enjoy Alan Moore's next maxi-series project that was already in the works. Howard Chaykin's next work will not appear under the DC banner. And though I will continue to write **Teen Titans** and possibly **The Adventures of Superman**, I will not be able to create any projects such as a new **Night Force** or something on the calibre of **Crisis On Infinite Earths.**

To the dealers, simply calculate the profits you will not receive. It doesn't matter if you feel our stand is right or wrong, DC's rating policy is costing you money.

Until this current situation, I have never complained about any working situation in public. I am very sorry I've had to break a 19-year policy, but this situation, and the results that came from speaking my mind, show how important the topic of labels, ratings, censorship, etc. have become.

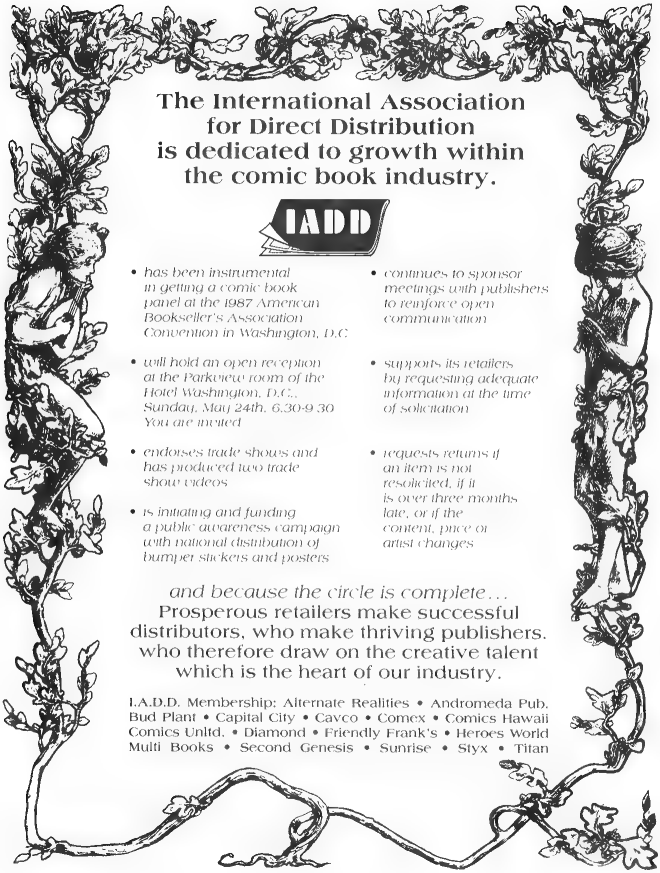
What bothers me most is that DC's current policy has put a wedge in what has been a very happy and profitable relationship for us both. For seven years I've been given a totally free hand to create stories and books which have greatly helped to change DC's image with the readers and position within the market. We have always in the past worked out our problems together, and, this past summer, while I was suffering through my writer's block, DC helped finance my time not spent writing. I am truly sorry that this concern for the creator, that has been demonstrated for the past several years, has been so totally turned around that one public difference in policy – a policy they themselves announced in a public forum – the **Comics Buyer's Guide** – has resulted in such a sad severing of that relationship. It does neither of us well. What is most disappointing is that DC's hardening comes in a year when they are most indebted to the creators for pushing DC forward – and among the creators most responsible for DC's overwhelming success this past year include all four creators who signed the petition which got me fired.

To save my position as editor, I was asked to write a letter recanting the public publishing of our petition. Because of the nature of my disagreement with DC's rating policy, I wrote the following letter. It was not accepted, but I publish it here intact because it does indeed sum up my feelings on why DC's rating policy, and indeed most rating policies, cannot work.

* * *

Dear C.B.G.

After the letter signed by Frank Miller, Howard Chaykin, Alan Moore and me appeared in **CBG** #691, I began getting phone calls from a number of publishers and concerned friends thinking that I had quit writing for DC Comics and my regular assignments. I think that impression was given by the unfortunately misleading headline "Four Creators Refuse To Work on Rated Comics" as well as Alan Moore's eloquent and personal editorial in the same issue.



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Therefore, I feel the need to correct the mistake both in the headline and people's impressions.

The letter the four of us agreed upon and signed was sent to DC's publisher. I am sorry it had to see print in a public forum at the time it did, and though I wish it could have remained private between the creators and DC Comics, I fully support its intent and purpose.

I do feel there is a need to state my point of view in this matter: I am firmly and irrevocably against labels. I believe the label system to be misconceived and potentially damaging for various reasons: There is a confusion as to what the labels mean and what is acceptable. The constant revising of the labels makes it impossible to know what is acceptable to write one month and what isn't. Further, any discussion and change of the standards would reflect what has happened in the past and not what is happening at that moment, as any book suddenly affected because of a shift in the standards would not be seen on the newsstand for almost three months after the change has been made and will reflect a feeling that is, by then, six months in the past.

Alan Moore, Frank Miller, Steven Grant and others have more than eloquently explained the folly of a labeling system. I do not feel the need to repeat what they have said, however let me say that I feel the problem we are experiencing is not one of labels, but of adequately telling the retailers, in clear, precise terms, exactly what they are buying, the possible audience the books are intended for, and to let the retailers decide for themselves how they will display the comic as per local community standards as decided in the Supreme Court decision on pornography.

If DC, Marvel, and any other company wants to publish their labels and standards in their sales order form, more power to them. The local retailer needs to know what they are ordering. Then it is up to the local retailer to properly display the comic. If the laws in Texas are substantially different from the laws in New York, then the comics should be displayed accordingly. However, it is not up to the companies to label these titles because what might be considered universal in New York may not be considered universal in Fort Worth. Indeed, it is quite possible that whereas **The New Teen Titans,** which is supposed to get a Universal rating, may be considered tame in Chicago, it may in fact incite local censorship committees in Baton Rouge. If that occurs, the Universal rating will backfire on the companies and cause more damage than any possible benefit.

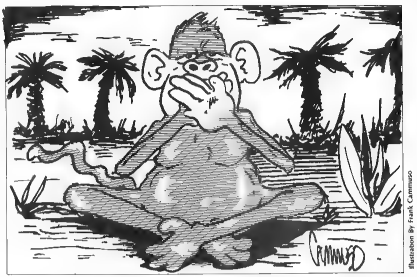

Illustration By Frank Cammuso

Simply put, the companies should spend the time and money informing the local retailer. They should alert the retailer in their order form what is in the comic, and then it is up to the retailer to decide for himself the audience that book is intended to reach and where it is to be displayed as per his local community standards. It is quite possible in one city there would be no problem displaying **Batman** next to **Omaha The Cat Dancer,** while in another city there could be trouble placing **Batman** next to **Archie's Pals 'n Gals.** Again, it is the retailer, given proper information, who decides the local community standards. They can not and should not be decided in offices in New York City. And no labeling system devised can be a barometer of what is universally accepted both in Los Angeles, California and Yazoo City, Mississippi.

Finally, if given accurate content information, the local retailer still refuses to care about what he sells or where he displays the comics, then no label system will help him. There can be no fool-proof system if some fool insists on demanding that others protect him instead of protecting himself.

Because of the nature of the stories I tend to write, I doubt if any of my material would be adversely affected, however that only further proves my sincerity in taking an active stance against the very concept of labels even when I am not specifically affected by them. I don't believe I can make my point any clearer.

To requote the important aspects of our letter – "To the extent that it is possible under DC's rating system, we will honor our existing contractual obligations to DC. However, we will not consider producing any new work for DC for as long as DC maintains its position in this matter."

This did not and does not mean I will not continue to work for DC on all my current titles; it clearly states I will create no new books for them. It is my intent to continue on **The New Teen Titans, Teen Titans Spotlight** and **The Adventures Of Superman** as I have in the past, but I will not initiate any new books beyond those titles and a possible one-shot special that I previously agreed to write until the current policy toward labels is changed.

* * *

Whether you agree or disagree with DC's rating policy, or how it has handled itself vis-a-vis my situation, I suggest you write to DC c/o Jenette Kahn, Publisher, DC Comics, 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10103. It doesn't matter which side you accept, let DC know your feelings. It is important that they hear from the readers who pay the bills.

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news and opinion

n&o

FRIENDLY FRANK GOES TO COURT

In a few short weeks, a landmark legal case affecting the entire comics industry is scheduled to go to trial in the state of Illinois. At issue in **The State of Illinois vs. Michael Correa** is whether a comic book store has the right to sell comics deemed obscene by the local police department. Correa is the manager of Friendly Frank's Inc. of Lansing, Illinois—the store in question.

The above scene is from Omaha The Cat Dancer, published by Kitchen Sink. The comic features mature subject matter.

Obscenity, as everyone well knows, is difficult to accurately define. To cite the words from Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, *I can't define obscenity but I know it when I see it.* In this particular case, a jury will be asked to define obscenity in the following manner: Do the specific comics cited by police as being for sale at Friendly Frank's Comics Inc. have any redeeming social or artistic value?

If any member of the jury finds any of the comics to have value, a not guilty verdict will be passed. On the other hand, if found guilty of selling comics deemed by the jury to be obscene, Correa faces a $10,000 fine and up to 365 days in jail. The repercussions, however, will be felt by retailers nationwide. Comic book store owners will no longer be able to carry comics aimed at adult readers without **risking** becoming prey to anyone who wants to start a comic book witch-hunt.

As store owner Frank Mangiaracina is one of the principle defendents involved in this case, **Four Color** decided it would be more apropos to present the story in his words as opposed to standard news style.

FOUR COLOR: What happened at your store?

MANGIARACINA: On December 10, 1986, our store in Lansing, Illinois (Friendly Frank's Comics Inc.), was entered by six policemen who proceeded to arrest the manager, Michael Correa on charges of "intent to disseminate obscene material." Mike was released on $1,000 bail shortly thereafter.

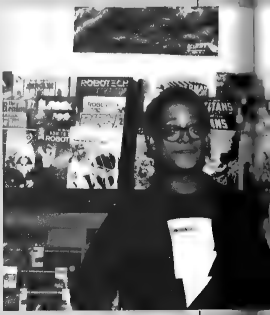
The store was closed for "violation of zoning regulations" that stated, "Adult material may not be sold within 1,200 feet of a residential area." My lawyer, Judy Goldstein, managed to get the store opened on December 15. So we were closed four days.

FOUR COLOR: Exactly what material did the police object to?

MANGIARACINA: Well, there was some stuff they just mentioned to Mike in the store as being obscene and then there were items that I assume they felt were more serious and that they might acutally be able to make a case. The items they mentioned in writing on their police report were **Bizarre Sex** #5 featuring Omaha the Cat Dancer [Kitchen Sink Press], **The Bodyssey** by Richard Corben [Catalan Communications], **Murder** (we had #2 and #3 on the rack—we're not sure which one they objected to) [Renegade Press], **Omaha The Cat Dancer** #1-3 [Kitchen Sink] and **Weirdo** #17 and #18 [Last Gasp].

FOUR COLOR: Didn't they also object to the Wonder Woman poster by DC?

MANGIARACINA: Yes. Items they objected to verbally included the Wonder Woman poster in the window (the wrap-around cover to #1), **Moonshadow** [Epic Comics], **Swords of the Swashbucklers** [Epic], The **She Hulk** graphic novel [Marvel Entertain-



ment] and the Black Cat and Storm posters [Marvel Ent.]. All of these they said were obscene but they weren't on the list of materials we have to defend ourselves against.

FOUR COLOR: Where were these titles located? Were they in a spearate adult section in your store?

MANGIARACINA: I'm sorry but I really can't go into their location as that's part of our defense.

FOUR COLOR: Do you feel you have been responsible as a store owner to your clientele?

MANGIARACINA: Yes I do. Since a store was closed down for selling **Alien Encounters** #5 [Eclipse Enterprises] to a kid, we've been very much on the watch.

FOUR COLOR: Was that store closed down one of yours?

MANGIARACINA: No. It was a store in a northern suburb of Chicago. We're [Friendly Frank's] in a southern suburb.

In that case, the kid's father—who happened to be a lawyer—send the kid in to look for this particular book that he happened to know contained some nude scenes in it. And then they closed down the store as a result.

So I asked my store managers to be on the lookout for anything suspicious. Kids to not buy **Alien Encounters.** The very small number of copies we sell are generally to adults. It is possible that somebody over 18 may have bought one of them but as far as a five-year-old kid, no.

FOUR COLOR: Has any parent ever brought a complaint to you previously?

MANGIARACINA: No, and in this case there was no community complaint. The only complaint originated at the police station.

FOUR COLOR: How would you describe the community of Lansing? Concervative?

MANGIARACINA: I really don't know the community that much. I don't live there. It is about 15 miles away from where I do live, Gary [Indiana]. I hadn't felt it would be as conservative as some of the other areas where I had stores. One reason for that is at one of my stores we were requested when I filled out our business licenses not to sell adult material. So we didn't sell adult material in that location.

When we filled out the business license and all the permits for this store in Lansing, that never came up. There was never any request about not selling adult material.

In fact, there is a video store on the same street as me, just as close to a residential district, that has a whole X-rated section.

FOUR COLOR: Of the publications listed in the police complaint, have any of their publishers offered to help you?

MANGIARACINA: I've contacted them all and received responses from everyone except the publisher of **Heavy Metal.** Ron Turner at Last Gasp was especially helpful. As soon as I mentioned it to him, he sent me $500. That helped us out a fair amount. Denis Kitchen now is talking about doing a benefit portfolio for us. If there was any money left over it would go into a fund in case something along these lines happens to another comic book store.

I feel real strongly that the money should be available because in my case I had to come up with bail money and a $500 retainer for the lawyer within an hour. There are a lot of comic book stores out there that can't come up with enough money for their comic book order every week, nevertheless an extra $600 dollars. [Correa was held on $1,000 bail of which Mangiaracina had to post ten percent to get him released.]

I think it's very important the money be there right away. Ron Turner would have done it but it took a week to get the check from California. I'm sure my manager wouldn't have wanted to spend a week in jail.

FOUR COLOR: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

MANGIARACINA: We're going to court on May 15th. We did ask for a trail by jury. We do have a say who's in the jury. All 12 members of the jury do have to unanimously agree there's no redeeming social or artistic value to any of the items in question. I guess we'll see how conservative the community is then.

I really feel we're going to get a **not guilty** here.

I feel that comic book shops should stock everything that we got busted for, but that's just my personal feeling.

* * *

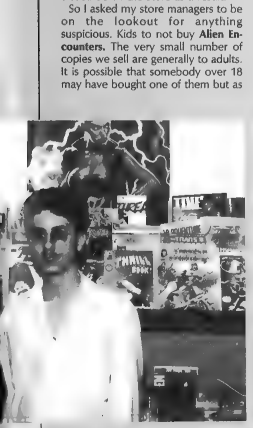
When asked to comment on the case, arresting officer Sergeant Jack Hoekstra of the Lansing, Il Police Department declined comment.

OPINION: With all the recent claims that certain comics contain sexually explicit material, it is not surprising that a conservative community in mid-America has attacked a comic retailer We find it ridiculous that the police have objected to nudity and not to the mindless violence of say **G.I. Joe** or any other titles containing gratuitous fight scenes.

Without trying to upset too many police officers, sex and nudity are a part of life and will, by extension, be represented in various forms of art.

While the police officers (who are supposed to be public servants) were busy arresting the manager of Friendly Frank's, no doubt several outstanding Lansing residents were patronizing the X-rated section of the local video store. It is interesting to note that the video store containing far more realistic scenes of sex has yet to be labeled obscene by the police.

Four Color Magazine wishes to offer our support to Managiaracina.



At Friendly Frank's in Lansing, Il. are Michael Correa, left, and Frank Mangiaracina, right. Correa is facing charges of "intent to disseminate obscene material." Note the Storm poster in the background.

ASTRO BOY RETURNS FOR NOW

Good news for Americans already busy converting their dollars to yen: Now Comics, determined to undermine the trade deficit, has set their sights on another Japanese import. With **Speed Racer** tucked under their kimonos (see N&O **Four Color #4**), the folks at NOW have decided to import the "Mickey Mouse" of Japan. While the character in question has gears instead of ears (he's a robot, after all), Astro Boy has been no less endearing to the Japanese public. A creation of Osamu Tezuka, the father of Japanese animation, Astro Boy has soared through several hundred episodes, countless endorsements and has achieved the status of pop culture superstar in the land of the rising sun.

"Astro Boy is actually the world's most popular robot hero," said NOW Publisher Tony Caputo. "He was the very first television animation for Japan and also the one that started it all as far as Japanese animation is concerned."

All pre-adolescent, robot superstars have their moment of birth but ironically, Astro Boy's origins do not stem from a small Sony screen. Creator Osamu Tezuka first envisioned the character as a comic book in the late 1950s. "Then he took the comic book and made it into the first television animation in Japan," said Caputo. "It was also the very first Japanese animation to ever be shown in the states."

NOW purchased the rights to the original Astro Boy series, syndicated on American television in 1964. The series was black-and-white. NOW disavows any relation to their character and the 1980 color version, produced for Nippon Television. The color series, described as being camp, survived a meager 36 episodes.

NOW's color comic, shipping in two months, will be written by Michael Dimpsey (creator of NOW's **EB'NN**) with plotting assistance from Fred Patten, an expert in Japanese animation. Patten doubles as the series' story editor. The artistic team on the monthly title will include penciller and colorist Ken Steacy and inker Rodney Dunn. While the first two issues sport Steacy artwork on the cover, **Astro Boy** will feature rotating cover artists such as Mark Wheatley, Chuck Fiala and Brian Thomas.

Caputo said the stories are going to be based on the original series but will not be adaptations. "They're all original stories. All we're doing to Astro Boy is modernizing the entire concept. Back in the '60s, a little robot hero was unique. But now, robots have taken over the entire industry. What we are doing is emphasizing that Astro Boy is the most sophisticated robot ever made. We're going to really play on the high-technology aspect."

For those uninitiated to the lore of Astro Boy, perhaps this brief capsule of the initial storyline will help: Set in the 21st century, Astro Boy is the creation of the brilliant but somewhat crazy scientist, Dr. Boynton. When his son is killed in an automobile accident, Boynton fashions a sophisticated robot in the dead boy's image.

At first, Boynton treats the robotic lad like a son until the scientist goes over the edge and sells Astro to a robot circus. Not to despair, Astro Boy makes new friends at the circus and goes on to other adventures.

"People are going to pick up the book and they're really going to like it," said Caputo. "The story has worked for many years. Astro Boy is the most popular character in Japan. He does Toshiba cassette deck commercials, sells, house paint, sells all kinds of Walkmans, watches and things like that. He is the **big thing** in Japan."

Astro Boy will ship in July and carry a $1.50 cover price.

THEORIES ON NEW UNIVERSE FAILURES

At press time, Marvel Entertainment cancelled four of the original eight New Universe titles. Concluding their runs will be **Kickers Inc.**, **Nightmask**, **Merc** and **Spitfire and the Troubleshooters.** Surviving this recent pink slip spree are **Star Brand, Justice, Psi-Force** and **D.P. 7.**

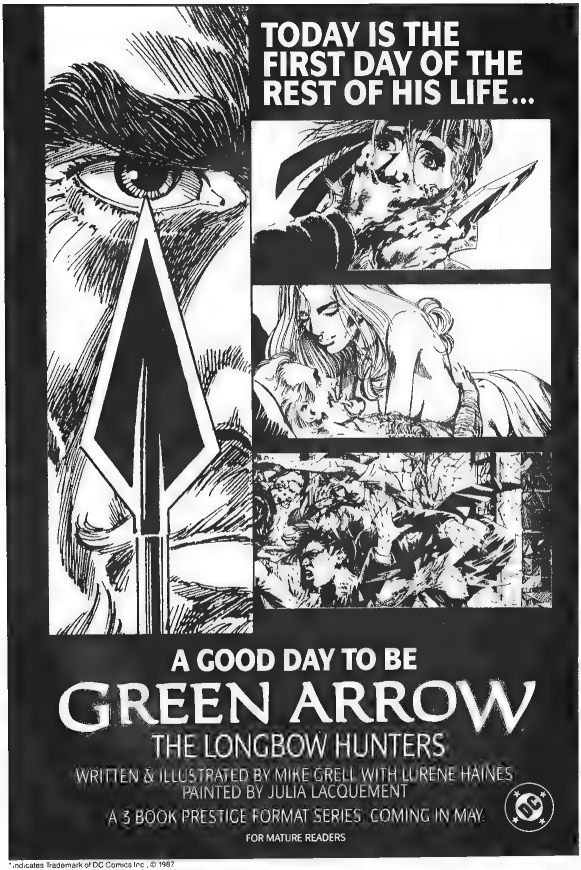
"While the four titles that will be ending didn't gather quite the following needed to warrant their continuing as monthly series, the characters will continue to appear and interact with the overall New Universe concept," said Steve Saffel, Marvel's promotion manager. "This is not unlike the original situation with the Incredible Hulk. That title ended after six issues but The Hulk was still alive in The Avengers and Fantastic Four as well as other titles. He eventually gained another series and now has been around continuously for almost 25 years."

Launched in the summer of 1986 under an ambitious media campaign, the New Universe line seemed destined for greatness and great sales. At least that was the impression Marvel promoted to collectors and store owners. While the cancellation of four titles does not suggest that the New Universe concept as a whole has failed, it does suggest it is floundering.

In order to gain a better perspective as to why the four titles didn't make it, **Four Color** invited five key people from different points in the industry to comment. Representing the official Marvel viewpoint was Saffel, so we begin with him:

Steve Saffel, promotion manager, Marvel Entertainment:

These titles did not fly for the same reason that any title might not fly. It's just a matter of the right audience finding the right title at the right time. All four concepts had merit. All four concepts warrant the characters continuing with one exception. There is one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character who will be coming to an end. But the rest of them will remain a viable part of the New Universe and they just didn't, as independent concepts, gather a strong enough following.

Don Thompson, co-editor and Comics Reviewer for *The Comics Buyer's Guide:*

If they were DC titles, they would be considered very successful. It is just by Marvel standards they weren't doing so well. They were in the same range as most of DC's titles. They were, in effect, DC titles being published by Marvel, as far as sales were concerned. And that's not good enough.

They also weren't very good. They were really very drab, uninteresting comic books. If they didn't have the Marvel symbol on them, I don't think they would have sold at all.

Bob Gray, owner, The Twilight Book and Game Emporium in Syracuse, New York:

Basically, they didn't deliver the quality they were promising. It came down to that. Marvel did a lot of advance publicity and didn't produce what they promised, a high quality product. And they didn't let the retailers know enough about the product prior to the sales. I think people got really sick hearing about the New Universe and not knowing what it was about. When it got here, it just wasn't any big thrill.

Their marketing plan was brilliant—it worked for **Secret Wars**—and consequently, I think people were on the guard for this. When people saw this was just as bad as **Secret Wars** and probably worse in some respects, I think the final decision on the part of the consumer was it wasn't worth the extra money.

There is such an abundance of material out there and 95% of it is garbage. Unfortunately, the New Universe just got lost in the garbage.

Kim Thompson, editor, *Amazing Heroes:*

It is tempting to say they failed just because they were all so mediocre but you could argue that on most other Marvel comics.

I think you're going to find a lot of people, with the benefit of hindsight, who will be able to track down exactly why they failed. On the other hand, those people are probably publishing comics that are failing. They have this perfect vision that they are now deploying via hindsight.

I guess the short answer to the question is, no. The fact of the matter is that no one knows why some things succeed or fail except in retrospect.

John Davis, co-owner, Capital City Distribution:

I'd say it was multiple reasons. Whenever you produce art by committee it comes out formula-bound. I think the best work is always done by individuals who have something to say, not a committee coming up with something they think will sell. Even given that limitation, if they had put strong, creative people on the books, they would have sold, no question about it.

To add to the problem about not having names, they had a constantly changing roster. Even if they created some fan following it was broken when different creators took over. It was thus very difficult for the books to get off the ground because of that.

I think there was a negative reaction based on all the hype. Before the New Universe came out everyone was kind of hoping it would bomb. There was so much hype that the New Universe was going to be a big deal that it would have had to be a big deal in order for it to work. People just didn't feel it was going to happen.

When it came out and was mediocre at best, that was bad enough. Based on the level of sales on the retail level, the books never took off. Every month our retailer orders went down. You normally do see that for the first three or four issues of any title, but those titles kept dropping 10%-20% every month. I saw the handwriting on the walls really by the end of last summer.

The remaining four titles stand a chance if they put some strong people on them and keep them on. There has got to be some commitment. Marvel's general problem is thinking that writers and artists are going to be interchangeable. To some extent they are right. The best selling Marvel titles do have momentum based on the characters. But I think what the direct market is all about is people being more selective. I think what is happening now is people want the best books available.

I thought the basic idea for the New Universe was a good one for Marvel. I thought it would personally do very well, both from a business standpoint and for Marvel's sake as remaining a viable company for the future. A lot of their characters are bound in the '60s. It was time to create new ones or even revitalize the old ones like DC is doing. Something has to be done. You just can't keep continuing on.

Marvel is presently in a reevaluation period with the New Universe. While no solid plans have been announced, a new title is in the planning stages according to Saffel, and new creative teams for the remaining titles are being considered.

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ACROSS A VAST OCEAN

At long last, Europe's finest artist invades U.S. shores.

When Jean Giraud adopted the pseudonym of Moebius in the early 1960s, he had no idea that it would stay with him into the late 1980s. However, this somewhat cryptic name now stands for one of the world's greatest figures in graphic story-telling. Although well-known and highly regarded in Europe, his name will be even more widely known in the United States as Marvel launches an ambitious publishing venture this year by producing a series of graphic novels by this talented Frenchman.

In the early 1800s, Thomas Jefferson pulled off the real estate deal of all time when he concluded the Louisiana Purchase, buying one-third of the North American continent from Napoleon. In a similar vein, Marvel's publishing agreement with Moebius' company, Starwatcher Graphics, will open up vast horizons to explore, many never seen before. The story of the deal is one aspect, but the story of the man and his art is an even richer perspective into what should be THE comics event of the next two years.

By Ron Thomas

The graphic novels will be published nder Marvel's Epic imprint, beginning in id-May and following a bi-monthly chedule thereafter. Thus, Marvel will be ommitting a vast portion of its resources nd publishing schedule to this project. he books in the series and publishing etails as they are at this time are:

- **Upon a Star,** 72 pp., $9.95, shipping May 12, 1987
- **Arzach and Other Fantasy Stories,** 72 pp., $9.95, shipping July 14, 1987
- **The Airtight Garage,** 120 pp., $12.95, shipping Sept. 8, 1987
- **The Long Tomorrow and Other Science Fiction Stories,** 72 pp., $9.95, shipping Nov. 10, 1987
- **The Gardens of Aedena,** 72 pp., $9.95, shipping Jan. 11, 1988
- **Pharagonsia and Other Strange Stories,** 72 pp., $9.95, shipping March 8, 1988.

This is a huge undertaking for any company and Epic Editor Archie Goodwin is the man responsible for pulling Marvel's end of his job together. Goodwin is part pro and part fan when it comes to Moebius' work, making him the perfect choice to ramrod the task.

"I've turned down opportunities to work on other graphic novels," said Goodwin. "There are two main reasons why I wanted to do this series. First, I would like a collected, perfectly matched set for myself . . . and it's high time this was done." Goodwin pointed out that it has been personally frustrating for him to go into larger comics specialty shops to get books of Moebius' work and only be able to get French editions. It's as if there was a barrier like watching a movie with subtitles," he said. Still, the artwork was lavish enough to impress Goodwin.

"After 23 years in this business, just when I think I'm completely hard and cynical about it, something like this comes along," Goodwin said. "It takes a lot to move me and Moebius can do that."

As far as it being "high time" to publish Moebius' work in high-quality English editions, Goodwin made several relevant points. First, it has been a period of years since Moebius' largest wave of American exposure in **Heavy Metal,** which Goodwin termed "awkward and sporadic." Secondly, that lapse of time has allowed a new generation of fans to come along who have not yet sampled the masterworks of Moebius. Thirdly, Marvel sees these graphic novels as having the potential to go into the general reading public as trade paperbacks in bookstores as well as comics shops.

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Another angle on the Epic series will be its coherence as Moebius is creating new material to pull together the continuity of the "Moebius Universe." The first book, **Upon a Star** will be the first English presentation of that material. Then, the fifth book, **The Gardens of Aedena,** will be all-new stories and art published simultaneously in the Epic series and in French editions. Together, these two books will be the cement that holds the continuity together.

However, each book will contain some new material, a new cover and an interview with Moebius himself providing personal backgrounds and viewpoints on the stories. Because of the high calibre of material to be presented and the importance of this big venture, Marvel will promote the series heavily with special dealer incentives, personal promotional appearances by Moebius, and massive advertising support including an ad in **Rolling Stone.**

Still, while all of the business concerns may be interesting, as Shakespeare might have said, "The Art's the Thing."

TO LOSE NOTHING IN TRANSITION

One of the greatest challenges to be overcome in the production of this series is the process of accurately transferring Moebius' scripts from French to English. Straight translation is not enough since even simple words have many subtle shades of meaning. Thus, each caption or speech must be carefully scrutinized to be sure that the original meaning **and** flavor are retained.

This is where Jean-Marc and Randy Lofficier come in. They are handling the translations for Starwatcher Graphics and supervising every editorial move that Goodwin makes. Both parties are being as careful as possible to be sure that everything is correctly stated.

"It creates a different set of problems," Goodwin said. "Sometimes I may be tempted to write a little bit more into the stories. But, what we want is a real translation of Moebius, not a Lofficier-Goodwin rewrite. We want to capture the spirit."

Jean-Marc Lofficier concurs and his comments come from professional experience. He has just finished a French translation for a book of stories by Edgar Allen Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, and Ambrose Bierce, among others.

"For better or worse, Moebius is not the best writer in French comics," said Lofficier. "In the same fashion, Lovecraft and (Robert) Howard may not be the best writers in English. Nevertheless, they have distinctive styles. If I translate their work into French, I could improve upon their style but it would lose their specific flavor. Trying to adapt Moebius into English presents the same problems in reverse.

"There is a line that must not be crossed," he added. You should never create new material that is not in the original, no matter how much you would like to."

It is obvious that Lofficier sees this project as a labor of love, to create the best possible presentation of Moebius' work to an American audience. The deal with Marvel, including some false starts, took over a year-and-a-half to put together. Once concluded, one of the key provisions was that Moebius and his people retain total creative control. This is to prevent some of the frustrations felt in earlier American translations.

"A lot of the translations done by **Heavy Metal** . . . except in the very early days, fell below the standards that I, Moebius, and

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Americans who read French would have expected," Lofficier lamented. He added that many points were missed in those translations due to lack of knowledge of French slang and culture.

To avoid this kind of problem, it was important that Lofficier as translator and Goodwin as editor develop a strong rapport. Fortunately Goodwin is one of the writers "I respect most in the American comic book industry," Lofficier said.

Early in their collaboration, Goodwin's natural creativity started to emerge. Loficier said that eighty percent of the time, Goodwin's writing and editing skills made the translated scripts smoother and more fluid while keeping an accurate representation of the original French. However, "twenty percent of the time his writer personality got the better of him," Lofficier said.

For example, there was a simple line of dialogue in which one character says to another, roughly, "You know how unpredictable this thing is." While there are a lot of ways to structure that sentence with correct English grammar, Goodwin's edited version included a new metaphor: "This thing is as unpredictable as a Vegan centipede." While that's vivid, colorful language, it didn't quite fit. Lofficier pointed out that there was no mention of any Vegan centipede in the "Moebius Universe" and new concepts should not be introduced in the translating process. The creative process is the sole province of Moebius and the product must be the result of his unique vision. It was never an angry thing; this process was a professional discussion by men who are among the very best at what they do working toward a common goal, the best and most authentic editions possible.

"I am very happy with the way that Marvel gave us total creative control."

THE THREE AGES OF MOEBIUS

Jean Giraud's career has been a personal journey, an evolutionary process. Because the man is so obviously sensitive and intelligent, he has understood these changes as they occured in his life and allowed them to influence his work. Thus, early work by Giraud is vastly different than his current material and it should be since it's not being done by the same man.

Giraud left school at age 16, the normal age for Europeans, and went to art school where he studied design and decorating techniques. It was probably this formal training that gave him his grasp of color techniques and precise skills. Goodwin

calls him "an amazing draftsman, arguably the best cartoonist in the world."

That tremendous potential began to be realized before young Giraud completed his schooling. In 1954, he sold his first comic strip, **The Adventures of Frank and Jeremy.** It was at this time that he also did his first magazine illustrations. In 1956, he was drafted into the French Army during the war with Algeria but his artistic development continued as he did work for a military magazine.

After his discharge, Giraud was an assistant to the French artist Joseph Gillain. Gillain taught the young artist an important lesson, not to copy but to draw from life. Working from life was a key part of all of Giraud's formal art instruction. It is also a key characteristic of the cartoonists who were influences on him.

Foremost among Giraud's influences were Alex Raymond and his work on **The Phantom, Flash Gordon,** and **Mandrake the Magician,** Milton Caniff's **Steve Canyon** and **Terry and the Pirates,** and Hal Foster's **Prince Valiant** and **Tarzan.** Giraud saw these as originators of the comics art form.

"It was a strange way to have evolution . . . by killing yourself."

They had more formal art training and were from a time when drawing from life was stressed. Rather than swipe from established strips, "They had nothing to copy," Giraud said. "They had to create."

His specific comments about these titans of comics art reveal aspects of the style that would become Moebius'. Of Raymond, "The way he was drawing science fiction, he had a vision, a world. Flash Gordon's world of Mongo was really a dream." Foster's work, especially on **Prince Valiant,** Giraud termed "very classical," while he called Caniff "a great master" who used "Japanese brush strokes . . . I was trained to do a synthesis of Hal Foster, Alex Raymond, and Milton Caniff."

After this short studio period, Giraud, who at this time signed his work "Gir," found success with a new western strip called **Fort Navajo,** later known as **Lieutenant Blueberry.** This strip began in 1964 and is still some of his best-known work today. However, the art technique was heavier, with more use of deep black shadows and dark tones, when compared with his current material.

The restless hand of a born creator needs other avenues and Giraud started doing satirical pieces for a magazine called **Hara-Kiri.** To separate this new work, done in a slightly different vein, from his commercially successful **Blueberry,** Giraud adopted the pseudonym "Moebius." In 1967, he began doing science fiction illustration for the French edition of **Galaxy** magazine and continued to use the new pen-name.

By the early 1970s, Giraud was doing complete stories under the new name and in a lighter style, using a finer line technique and leaving the artwork more open to color. By 1975, he was living a dual existence, still producing **Blueberry** under his real name but joining with other artists to produce a new magazine for his Moebius work. This magazine, **Metal Hurlant,** was the predecessor of the American **Heavy Metal.** This era continued and the work of Moebius took a higher priority than that of Giraud.

This period of powerful story-telling featured stirring artwork depicting graphically violent action, stark alien landscapes and cities and a somewhat bleak outlook. In 1980, this era would pass and Moebius, as he was now better known, would change, as well.

A CHANGE OF HEART

Moebius had always had a strong cinematic influence and that is understandable as France has a strong film tradition.

Young Giraud was impressed by Hitchcock, Goddard, and Truffaut and by 1980, his own artistic credentials led to Moebius working on production art for a film version of **Dune.** While that adaptation project never got off the ground, Moebius' spirit found new wings.

He was of a French generation that "believed in nothing but art or politics." However, Moebius said that, while working on **Dune,** "I discovered a new cosmic perspective. I developed a relationship with God, with the spiritual world."

While such a conversation is an intensely personal thing, Moebius said that this was a change in direction for him, a shift in his evolutionary process. However, he said that his prior evolution "was going down, lower and lower." He noted that he was involved with drugs, alcohol, and even had poor diet habits. His conversion of spirit led to a reversal in all areas and it was necessary. Moebius said that "it was a strange way to have evolution . . by killing yourself."

By taking hold of himself, Moebius was able to change his entire way of life and "change my picture of myself." He began to develop an appreciation for the Oriental philosophy of life and art and currently practices Tai Chi, the Chinese martial art that is actually a form of healthy and relaxing exercise. "If I was living a natural way, I wouldn't have to do Tai Chi."

Such an intellectual and emotional shift would have to be reflected in his art and it has been, but in subtle ways that might be overlooked if not actively sought. For example, Archie Goodwin commented on a comparison between Moebius and Walt Simonson, another prominent artist who packs detail into panel layouts. Goodwin said that he felt Moebius used "detail to cover up areas where he was having trouble drawing."

In fact, Goodwin's notion was quite accurate. Moebius freely admitted that his earlier, more pessimistic attitude was coming through in the barren landscapes "flat horizons and a few stones" that were backgrounds for his work. "Before, it was a problem to do nature trees, sky, and water. Now, I can do flowers. I enjoy it and it comes freely."

During this period of rediscovery, Moebius lived in Tahiti for a couple of years, seeking a natural kind of tranquility. In a way, he was following in the footsteps of his countryman, Paul Gaugin, who went to Tahiti in the 1890s to produce his finest impressionistic paintings. Despite parallels such as this, Moebius rejects the idea that he should be considered a fine artist. He said, "sometimes we have to work too quickly because we have to make money." However, it's easy to see how this period of conversion and renewal has benefitted his art.

Moebius' overall use of line and color has brightened with a lighter pen technique and a brilliant use of color. "I think it's a natural evolution. It comes naturally from my hands."

This union of art and artist through Nature is reminiscent of the Romantic era of poetry exemplified by Byron, Keats, and Shelley. This rediscovery of the classics and lyrical appreciation of Nature's pure beauty is a concept Moebius identifies with readily. Added to this is the Zen concept of ar-

A dapper Moebius relates on the California surf

tistic contemplation of simplicity. In Zen, it is preferable to sit in a featureless room with one, slightly imperfect piece of pottery. Then, by releasing the mind, one can see how the imperfection makes this pot beautiful and unique in its own right, a thing to be fully appreciated

With his heart lightened, Moebius was able to blend these seeming opposites from Western and Eastern culture into his own yin-yang perceptions. "The beauty is in the simplicity. Something can be complex and simple at the same time. It is easy to speak about it, but to do it is complex."

WHY SCIENCE FICTION?

"When I started to do science fiction, I didn't know why," Moebius said. "I was only following my pleasure. I think it may be a way to do something magic, to create a future."

The Epic graphic novels are intended to pull together a coherent universe of Moebius' design and one can see both eras, both moods represented in his work.

"I'm very pessimistic. I'm afraid we are killing our planet," he said. "In my stories, I want to show that it's not over. I want to show the danger to everyone.

"But everyone (in science fiction) does that. We are like mad prophets, saying that we are dying and killing our environment," Moebius added. "I try to give some hope, also."

He feels that there is a reason for the negative side of things, if only to show us by contrast the possibilities that are positive if people can change their minds, as Moebius did himself.

He doesn't come on too strong, like some TV Evangelist. Rather, as the tone of his work changes, its underlying message does, too. A story from 1977 issue of **Heavy Metal,** "Major Fatal," featured those barren landscapes and strong, dark emotions of hatred and prejudice. There is a resignation in his description of a pitched battle: "A fight will last only as long as it lasts."

Contrast this with "Celestial Venice," a story from the spring, 1986, issue of **Heavy Metal.** This story has no violence and no real action. Instead, it is almost a parable with a restful seashore rendered in pastels. It speaks of rising souls and cities that soar. Faith in purity of spirit causes the city's ascension. The parallels are there, but, couched in a science fiction framework, the message is not heavy-handed.

"I think science fiction is very moral," Moebius said. "It's a very beautiful way to speak about the present and a way to dream about humanity and man in general."

(Con't on page 56)

Greetings From RIVERDALE

Home of America's favorite teenagers

Nothing is sacred.

Captain America has just been "fired", Tony Stark became an alcoholic, Spider-Man's costume has been changed, Dick Grayson is no longer Robin, Barry (the Flash) Allen and Supergirl are dead, and–in fact–three quarters of DC's history never happened. In this day and age it has not only become accepted to tamper with a legend, it has become expected. The sole exception to this phenomenon has been the town of Riverdale.

This small community has remained untouched by the ravages of time. Here, they still adhere to solid American values like hard work, clean living, honesty, and of course Mom and Apple Pie. Since 1942, the town of Riverdale has been inhabited by that quintessential teenager, Archie Andrews, his pals (Jughead, Moose, and Reggie), and gals (Betty and Veronica), and, of course, Mr. Weatherbee and Miss Grundy.

This will probably come as quite a surprise to all the fans-with-a-capital-F, but behind Marvel and DC, Archie Comics is Top Dog. With the possible exception of Mickey Mouse, no other comic character has become so entrenched in American culture. Like Mickey, Archie has been elevated into becoming an almost sacred icon. He embodies everything that is pure and wholesome. He also, by the way, embodies everything that is profitable.

By Robert J. Sodaro & John A. Wilcox

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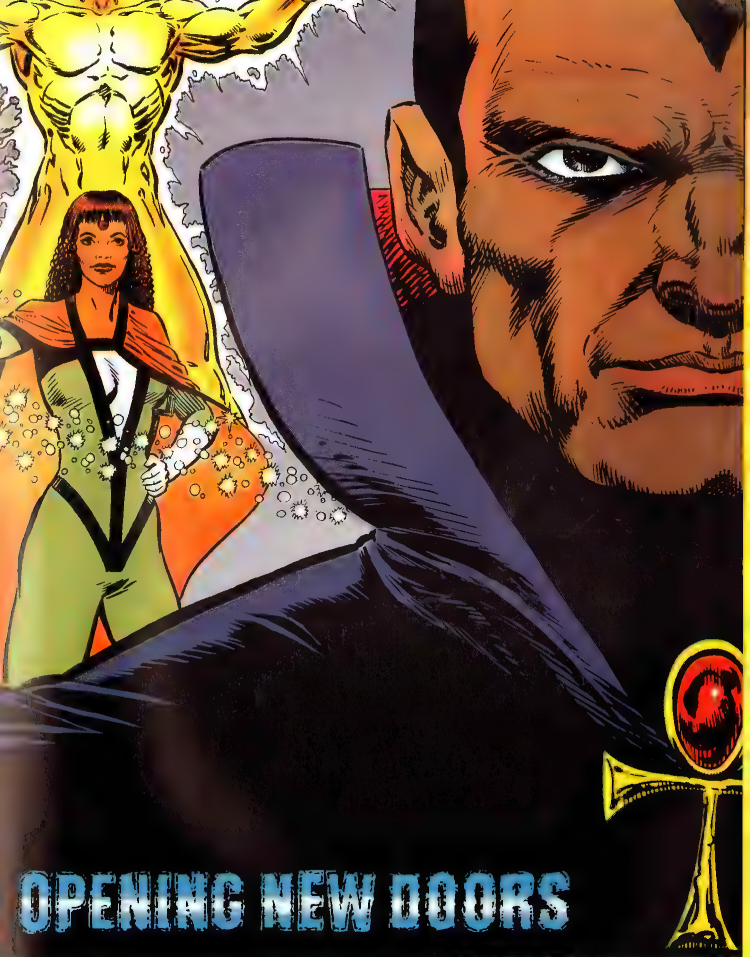

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RIVERDALE
Dan DeCarlo

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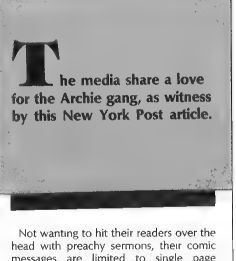
Unlike Marvel and DC, that are corporations owned by conglomerates, Archie Comics is owned by Michael Silberkleit and Richard Goldwater who inherited the business from their fathers. In fact, the family tradition continues into the third generation with David Silberkleit and Lisa Goldwater who have joined the Archie fold as well. It is this family attitude that keeps Archie and his cast on the straight and narrow. In a corporate environment, editorial decisions would be dictated by demographics and decisions would be arrived at by committee. With the Archie line, this is not so. Silberkleit and Goldwater are the **de facto** owners of the company and they, not some nameless, faceless corporate board of directors, are the final authority. This strong sense of family has kept the vision of Archie and his pals pure throughout the years.

The "basics" approach has proved to be a consistently strong seller in middle America where Archie proves to be a mirror of the heartland values. While **Elektra** and **The Watchmen** may be hot stuff to the fan market on the coasts they're not that easy to swallow in the Bible Belt. Archie seems attuned to the Mom and Pop market. "If you were to travel 200 miles west or south of here [the New York area], people think differently," said Silberkleit. He added that comics shops (and comic "fans") tend to be in urban areas on the coasts while the Archie line sells very well in the midwest and south. "There are two segments of the comic market, the people who buy comics in comic shops, and the people who buy them on the newsstand. Archie has its nitch in the newsstand market.

A TEEN IN THE '80s

Still, while Archie has remained the "typical teenager" throughout the years, his charm and appeal stem from the fact that what is "typical" in teenagers changes from year to year. Rather than set new trends, Archie and company are content to simply keep abreast of these changes. In the past year the various Archie titles have featured stories about breakdancing, the Springsteen craze, and MTV among others. More than just followers, Archie recently has started taking stands on various issues including smoking, runaways, and even drugs. "Drugs are a national problem," said Michael Silberkleit, "and we felt that Archie could deliver this message in the language and terms children relate to best."



Not wanting to hit their readers over the head with preachy sermons, their comic messages are limited to single page treatments of each subject. The drug campaign is taking place outside the pages of the Archie books, with it appearing on the sides of certain milk cartons, similar to the "missing children" photos of recent years. A notable exception to this single-page story treatment is an upcoming runaway story, that will be full length. The story deals with a friend of Archie and the gang's who has run away from home and how the kids eventually get her to call the runaway hotline number that is provided in the story itself. Still, all of this is provided as a supplemental service and is not the main thrust of the Archie line.

Silberkleit unabashedly states that comic books are strictly for children, noting that if other publishers wished to publish comic books for adults that was fine, "but don't call them comic books and don't package them to look like comic books." He further said that the publishers of the so-called "adult" material should keep in mind that he is a part of this market too, thus anything that affects comics affects him and his company as well. "I lived through that once [the Senate investigation of the 50s] and I don't want to go through it again."

The Archie formula for success has not significantly changed over the past 45 years. They've stayed with the slightly bumbling all-American boy (Archie), the girl next door with a heart of gold (Betty), and spoiled little rich girl (Veronica), the brain (Dilton) and of course our hero's best friend and so-called lazy layabout (Jughead). As an aside, it is interesting to note that all Archie clones from other publishers have fallen by the wayside, including **Bingo, that Wilkins Boy,** produced by Archie Comics themselves. Further, non-Archie titles, **(Josie and the Pussycats, Sabrina the Teenage Witch** and others) published by the company never could quite measure up to the success of ol' carrot top himself.

After 45 years of stories about Archie and his gang, the company intends to publish at least another 45 years of stories. Their bottom line attitude in this matter is, "if it's not broken, don't fix it." Silberkleit, Goldwater and editor Victor Gorelick all feel that there is no reason to inject "adult" material into the Archie titles since what they're doing not only sells, but sells incredibly well. Archie's "secret" is that they are distributed not merely to newsstands, but to supermarkets, book store chains, and other retail outlets.

At this point in time Archie is trading on almost half a century of clean living. Currently, Archie's marketing plan is to attract young upscale parents who remember the Archie characters from their youth. The idea is to get these parents to see an Archie book while on line at the grocery store, say "They were good for me, they'll be good for my kids." Gorelick related how they receive literally thousands of letters every week and not just from kids, but their parents as well. Apparently many parents will start reading the stories to their children and wind up buying more issues because they enjoy the stories themselves.

NEW YORK POST

Monday April 6 1987

40 cents beyond 50-mile zone, except L.I

35 CENTS

Hey, a girl's gotta keep up her reading

It was the literary event of the season for the comic book set, and 4-year-old Sierra Greenberg — a longtime "Betty & Veronica" devotee — wouldn't have missed it for the world. The 13th annual Comic Book Convention at the Roosevelt Hotel yesterday drew hundreds like Sierra who just adore the cartoon balloon literary style. And author Dan DeCarlo was there to sign her "Betty & Veronica."

THE BRIGHTEST PICTURES ARE IN THE POST

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DEAR BETTY

One of the more popular features running in **Betty's Diary** is a "letter of the month" column wherein Gorelick will run a letter from a reader who has a personal problem. Other readers are then invited to provide answers. In one recent installment a young child related how her parents were getting divorced and how she felt that her parents breakup was somehow her fault. Other youngsters wrote in with help, including one reader who's parents had recently been divorced. This reader told the first child that it wasn't her fault and that her parents still loved her. Certainly we should never underestimate the intelligence and compassion of children.

Not only do children and their parents feel an affinity towards the Archie stable of characters, but evidently television producers felt that way during the seventies, resulting in **Happy Days.** The setting and cast of characters bore a more than passing resemblance to Riverdale and it's inhabitants as Silberkleit and Goldwater were quick to point out. Filmation, of course, turned out several animated Archie series for Saturday morning TV. A few years back there was even a pilot for a live action Archie series.

As this article is being written, the wheels are in motion for a brand new Archie sitcom. Silberkleit wouldn't divulge any further information about the series, since it was still in the negotiation stages. He was quick to assure that, written right into the contract, will be a clause stating that the TV characters absolutely cannot deviate from their four color counterparts.

At this point in time Archie is trading on almost half a century of clean living.

Lest the reader believe that everything touched by the corporate hand of Archie be turned to gold, they also have had their share of klunkers. A few years back when the direct sales market opened up, Archie Comics jumped on the bandwagon with their own (albeit ill-fated) lineup of super heroes. Helmed by Rich Buckler (editor), and Bill DuBay (art director) under the Red Circle logo. The line faded into obscurity almost as quickly as it hit the stands. Still, this was not so much a failure on Archie's part, but rather a misjudgment of the marketplace as it then existed.

When Archie developed their super hero line, instead of creating characters ut of whole cloth, they decided to dust off several existing characters left over from the 50s and 60s. One of the problems they encountered was the cool reception their characters encountered from the fans. Part of the problem was that the most of these old MLJ characters had ties with the government and were still being written with a sixties mindset, with just a dash of "adult" themes to catch the fan's eye.

Unfortunately for Archie, the mix of left-over heroes, a pseudo-hip 50s approach to comics and the ever present watchful eyes of a para-military governmental organizations put off the fan element. Factored into this was a fair amount of confusing storytelling, and a 40 year history to most of the characters with which the fans were unfamiliar. To most observers, the Red Circle line was doomed from the start. In fairness, the line did boast some fairly impressive artists, including Alex Toth, Gray Morrow, Carmine Infantino, Dick Ayers and Steve Ditko (with Jim Steranko rendering the occasional cover). Perhaps one of the really tragic turn of events was that the added elements of supposedly mature themes not only couldn't save the line but probably hastened its demise.

Still, reviving the MLJ characters wasn't the only time that Archie dipped into the super hero market. The other time, however, lies closer to the heart of the company, as they used characters that they already employed. Pureheart the Powerful and his arch nemesis Evilheart were none other than Archie and Reggie decked out in longjohns and capes. In this incarnation Archie Andrews and his cast acted out the traditional super hero arche-

Co-owners Michael Silberkleit (left) and Richard Goldwater inherited Archie from their fathers.

??
AHEM, ARCHIE!
GULP! MR. LODGE!
TTTHWUP!
THE MONEY JUST FALLS INTO YOUR LAP...
THE ALL NEW
Bett
The Archies

Copyright, Archie

types in true Archie style.

The truly unique thing about the Archie characters is that they can be cast into all types of situations. These include several running features like, **Archie 1** (Archie in the Stone Age), **Archie's Tv Laughout** (where they parody TV shows and movies), Little Archie and many others. As we mentioned previously, it is the cast's universality that allows the writers to literally "drop them into" so many diverse situations. It is this same across the board appeal that makes them equally popular around the world. Archie and crew have been translated into a myriad of languages including Spanish, German, French, and Italian.

Another very popular aspect of the Archie line is its audience's participation. In most every book fans submit to the fashion pages the letter of the month (mentioned previously) and the Archie Club Reporter. In fact, **Katy Keene** is entirely audience participation, with readers sending in not only fashion designs, but designs for furniture, architecture, cars, and virtually everything else that appears in the book (the only thing that the fans don't do is plot, script, and actually draw **Keene**). A few years back DC Comics attempted an audience participation title, **Dial "H" for Hero,** that fell flat on its face.

For those of you who still, after all that has been said thus far, consider Archie Comics to be a small publisher, consider this: Archie publishes 23 separate 32 page titles, as well as 11 different digests. It is in this mark that Archie is indeed a trendsetter, as within the past year, Marvel has begun to issue three reprint books in digest form, while the Gladstone/Disney digest books are actually distributed by Archie. Here again, DC was unable to sustain their own line of digest books some years back. Why Archie succeeds where others have failed and will continue to fail is that Archie has realized that **where** you sell your product is every bit as important as the product itself.

As to where Archie is headed, just recently they announced a new direction for a number of titles, including Jughead, who will be slightly redefined to give him a greater "depth". **Laught, Betty and Veronica** and **Jughead** will also be renumbered, beginning again with first issues. While first issues appeal to the fan market, they really have little value to Archie's primary audience. Still, in the opinion of Gorelick, by renumbering these titles, kids will get a sense of "being in on the titles from the begunning."

Perhaps most interesting of all, Archie is the only major publisher that all but ignores the fan market. They feel that since they've gone 45 years without the fan market, they have no need to chase it now, especially after the demise of their Red Circle line. Consider this; if the fan market were to collapse tomorrow, First, Comico, Eclipse and all of the direct sales-only publishers would go belly up. Even DC and the mighty Marvel would be dealt crippling blows, as much of their current interests lie in the specialty market. Only Archie would stay rock solid, with all their distribution networks remaining intact.

At the outset, we stated that nothing is sacred. As this article shows, that is not necessarily the case with Archie and his pals–and if they're not sacred, they come as close as comic book characters can.

At the traditional Easter egg hunt held at the White House, Jughead signs autographs.

WHITE POST
SUPPLY
WHITE POST VA
Restorations

IS THE MEDIA THE MESSAGE?

COMICS HAVE SUDDENLY BECOME FRONT PAGE NEWS

By Mark Waid

Dark Knight, Maus, Superman, Love and Rockets. Any non-comics fan who reads the newspaper, watches the evening news on television, or pages through **People** magazine has been introduced to one or more of the "new" hot comics of the 1980s by now. American comic books have benefited from wider and more intense media coverage this past year than in years. And each passing day of it may mean it's a little less likely that the industry's supporters will ever again hear someone say, "[illegible] comics? Why, I

The media's new love affair with comic books shows no immediate sign of abating, but, realistically, there is no way to know just how long it will last.

TELEVISION AND THE COMICS

It's not been a secret why super heroes are the biggest staple of American comic books. After all, that's the particular subgenre of the medium that comics portray best. Space opera may be handled better on film, westerns and detectives might be portrayed better on television — but no one "does" super heroes better than the comic books.

Nevertheless, television still casts its cyclopean eye towards funnybooks and their costumed crimefighters from time to time. And exactly how comics are viewed should be no mystery to anyone who takes a quick overview of TV's various flirtations with super heroes.

It began in the late part of 1952, when a minor actor named George Reeves brought the Man of Steel to life in thousands of American homes. The live-action program, **The Adventures of Superman**, was actually more a spin-off of the long-running radio series than a reflection of the comics' cosmos-spanning adventures. Low production values dictated that most of the action centered in and around Metropolis and the Man of Tomorrow used his mighty powers to battle mob bosses, not super villains. **Superman,** (which, during the '50s, ran in early-evening primetime across most of the nation) became increasingly less adult-oriented over its five-year run. Incidents of real violence and encounters with ruthless killers vanished rather quickly, and the show's producers began to trivialize Superman himself by pitting the Man of Steel against namby-pamby crooks who were not even as intimidating as Perry White and who drew their guns only once per episode — to bounce bullets off of Superman's indestructible chest. Yawn. Still, the basic concept of Superman was played straight and its high ratings were probably as much responsible for the Metropolis Marvel surviving comics' great super hero purge of the 1950s as anything else. Though never a "sophisticated" program in any sense of the word, **Superman's** slide from a family-oriented show to a live-action cartoon that only a child could love was gradual. TV's next super hero fared not nearly as well.

In 1965, television producer William Dozier happened across a copy of **Batman** while on a business trip and before long 20th Century Fox had licensed from DC the right to create a show based on the Darknight Detective. In March of 1966, the first episode of **Batman** (based loosely on that same issue that had originally inspired Dozier) aired. It was a hit, and "Batmania" swept the nation almost instantaneously.

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Now, most everyone remembers **Batman** as "camp," a deserving rep for the most part. That pilot episode, though, was truer to the Batman comics of the day than most fans recall. The emphasis was more on detective-adventure work and less on ridiculous bat-gimmicks and, at one point, Batman even interrupts a burglary in progress and frightens his foes by casting a giant bat-like shadow. Certainly a lot of the dramatic impact of that moment was lost in the stark reality of TV — how intimidating is Adam West, anyway? — but at least a vague passing effort was made during **Batman's** first season to play the character a tad bit seriously from time to time. By the beginning of the second season, however, the show had degenerated into the spectacle everyone thinks of it as being to this day. **Batman** looked adult only compared to its created-for-TV competitors **Captain Nice** and **Mr. Terrific,** comedy super hero spoofs about which, less said, the better.

Never again would television give comics characters the "adult" treatment. Any and all of comics' other crimefighters were immediately relegated to Saturday morning cartoon shows and primetime kidshows like the late '70s' **The Amazing Spider-Man** and **Wonder Woman.** NBC toyed with capturing a post-adolescent audience with their version of **The Incredible Hulk** but quickly decided that the program shouldn't really be so much a show about Lee and

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So, using the media to increase circulation of certain comics by dribs and drabs. Is that the best we can do? What of it?

Kirby's green-skinned goliath as a reworking of **The Fugitive.**

Pattern's pretty clear by now, isn't it? The final word on how television and, by extension, the TV viewing public, views super heroes is exemplified by the quintessential TV super-doer, **The Greatest American Hero.** This adventure/comedy show chronicled the exploits of a highschool teacher who donned an alien suit that gave him super abilities. Sure, he solved his share of crimes, but the program's biggest continuing schtick was about how ridiculous and unrealistic comic book super heroes would be if they existed in the real world. The final verdict was in. Super-heroics, the stuff of comic books, were for kids.

And for those who might argue that Superman received fairly straightforward treatment in his first two movies, we need only point to **Superman III.** Superproducers Alexander and Ilya Salkind took the milieu of super heroes seriously, made it work and yet still stooped to camp. . . .

NEWSPAPERS AND COMICS

However, comics and their collectors have historically received exemplary treatment and respect from TV and newspaper reporters in the past.

Who are we **kidding?**

The **Tupelo Journal,** November, 1974 headlines a story about comics "Junk Could Be Tomorrow's Antiques."

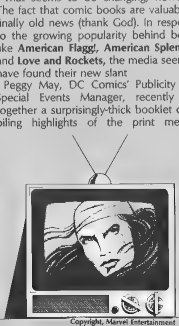
From the **Birmingham News,** April, 1972: "Great Scott! Those comics you threw away as a kid are worth real money, and local collector Curtis Ralya has over **one thousand** of them! Sha-Zam!"

And from the **Tallahassee Democrat,** June, 1976: "**Bang! Zap!** Did you know that the first ten-cent issue of **Action Comics,** containing the first appearance of Superman, now goes for upwards of $1,000? Holy antique, Batman!"

Stories with these and similar slants are all too familiar to comics fans who watched during the mid-'70s as the general public realized that comic books were "still around." By and large, comics, their creators and aficionados haven't fared particularly well in the past when reporters have come knocking, sniffing out a "cute" feature story.

That seems to be changing, however. The fact that comic books are valuable is finally old news (thank God). In response to the growing popularity behind books like **American Flagg!, American Splendor,** and **Love and Rockets,** the media seem to have found their new slant

Peggy May, DC Comics' Publicity and Special Events Manager, recently put together a surprisingly-thick booklet compiling highlights of the print media's coverage of DC during 1986. Based on a study of its contents, it's safe to say that the American reading public is, in a word, stunned. Taken aback that, not only do comic books still exist, they present the adventures of a Dirty Bat-Harry who drinks, totes a machine gun and takes no prisoners. Amazed that grown-ups would read a black-and-white comic about Hispanic teenagers or anthropromorphic aardvarks. And flabbergasted that someone would tamper with the Superman Legend (even though not one of them has followed it for the past ten years).



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"NOT JUST FOR KIDS ANY MORE!"

This past December, one appearance by writer Harver Pekar on **Late Night With David Letterman** introduced hundreds of thousands of potential Pekarites to **American Splendor** and promoted Letterman's people to invite Pekar back to the program twice since.

Art Spiegelman's **Maus** has been talked about everywhere from **Playboy** to **Esquire** to **The New York Review of Books.**

And the **L.A. Weekly,** Los Angeles' best-known "underground" newspaper,

Peggy May, DC Comics' Publicity and Special Events Manager, recently put together a surprisingly-thick booklet compiling highlights of the print media's coverage of DC during 1986.

devoted one of its summer 1986 issues to "Comics For Adults" and showcased a full color cover featuring the cast of **Love and Rockets.**

Everyone likes getting attention. In this case, though, what does it mean? And, more importantly, will it last?

One important factor that has to be taken into consideration is the cyclical nature of "soft" news – Sunday feature-page stuff. Whether or not the media perceive "the new, adult art form of comics" as an ongoing trend or as simply a fad has yet to be determined. Indeed, whether comics really did receive "unprecedented" media coverage last year is a judgment call. Fans who were reading **Green Lantern/Green Arrow** in the early 1970s are well aware that "Relevance in the Comics" was a hot news topic during that time. The Denny O'Neil/Neal Adams issues of **Green Lantern/Green Arrow** (#76-89), in which DC's verdant vigilantes examined the problems of overpopulation, male chauvinism, pollution, and drug abuse were touted by the media and the non-fan public alike as a breakthrough for "children's lit," as were the anti-drug issues of **The Amazing Spider-Man** (#96-98) that came out about the same time. Meanwhile when former Superman editor Mort Weisinger retired from the field in 1970 and DC gave the Metropolis Marvel a "face-lift" much like the one he's recently undergone, editor Julius Schwartz appeared on NBC's **Today Show** to talk about the new Man of Steel, preceding John Byrne by a decade and a half. The New Comic Books were the talk of the town.

For a while.

Then we went away.

ROMANCING THE MEDIA

The media's new love affair with comic books shows no immediate sign of abating, but, realistically, there is no way to know just how long it will last. Still, let's assume the best. Let's say that positive media coverage of comics **is** here to stay and the four-color medium will be firmly settled as a part of the heartbeat of American pop culture (or something equally as dramatic-sounding) from now on. What happens to the world of comics?

Well, for one thing, it's safe to assume that new readers will continue to filter into the field. During the summer of '86, many comics store owners reported an influx of new customers coming in and wanting to know how to get a copy of **Dark Knight.** Also, most B. Dalton and Waldenbook outlets that carry newsstand comics experienced a rise in walk-in traffic looking for issues of **The Man of Steel.** Clearly, the fact that all of these new – and, hopefully, returning – customers couldn't pick up a newspaper or magazine without seeing mention of Superman or Batman had a lot to do with the increase of born-again comics readers.

Of course, the media attention could backfire. One could theorize that these new readers, hearing about **Swamp Thing** and **Electra: Assassin,** could take the big step of walking into their neighborhood comics shop unescorted and could walk out with a copy of **Blue Beetle.** Regardless of the sophistication of a few select titles, comics are still targeted almost exclusively at adolescents. It's the joint responsibility of publishers and store owners to make certain these potential customers don't walk away from their first trip to Forbidden Planet with a fistful of funny-animal parody comics, thinking they've tapped into the hip comics they've been hearing about. They'll never come back.

So, using the media to increase the circulation of certain comics by dribs and drabs. Is that the best we can do? What of it? What are the real short and long range benefits of getting occasional coverage on **Entertainment Tonight?** What are the chances that increased awareness of comics will bring increased control and censorship? Fans have been clamoring for comics to be taken more "seriously" for many years. Now that it's on the verge of happening, is it going to be all we figured it would be? Next issue, in Part Two of "Is the Media the Message?" we'll take a close look at these and other questions. FC

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30 QUESTIONS

KEVIN MAGUIRE

October of last year found the editors of Four Color visiting Dick Giordano, DC Comics' executive editor. Giordano was one of the main guiding forces behind the recent DC renaissance – the actual reason for our visit – and was eager to show off a promotional drawing of the (at that date) forthcoming **Justice League.** Gesturing with enthusiasm at the drawing, Giordano proudly explained how a 26-year-old unknown artist walked into his office with a portfolio and walked out as the hot, young rookie prospect.

We were impressed. It's rare to see an artist with such control of facial characterization (Giordano went to great lengths to point out the variety of expressions and fresh views of several stale heroes). It is rarer still to see such talent in the hand of a penciller who has literally come from nowhere.

Kevin Maguire has certainly earned all of the praise he has received since beginning his run on the new **Justice League.** He is being promoted by DC as their next rising star, a title he appreciates but does not let influence his life.

Intrigued by Maguire's ability and accomplishments, **Four Color** visited him at his home in central New Jersey.

FOUR COLOR: How did you get started at DC? We've heard several different stories, including Dick Giordano's account that you just walked into his office and walked out with the **Justice League.**

MAGUIRE: I was working as a Romita Raider, which is a production department at Marvel. We do art corrections. It is made up of people whose samples Marvel has seen and feel they have ability and just need a little refinement. A lot of people were Romita Raiders - Steve Geiger, Tom Morgan, Mark McKenna

I was just drawing around Marvel when Kurt Busiek saw me working. He was doing a series at DC called **Wildcard** with Andy Helfer. The artist they had just left and they needed somebody. So Kurt said, "I like the way you draw. Let me show your stuff to Andy." Andy looked at it and said, "Alright, we'll give you the book."

I did that book and then I was offered the **Silver Surfer.** I felt that was great but Andy offered me **Justice League** instead. And that's how I got here.

FOUR COLOR: We hear that you're a movie buff. What do you enjoy?

MAGUIRE: I love Bond movies and good action movies. I loved **Lethal Weapon.** I saw it four times. I tell everybody I know to go see that movie!

FOUR COLOR: What would you say are your favorite movies?

MAGUIRE: That's a tough one. I went through this a couple weeks ago at DC. Just for fun, we had everyone write down their top ten movies. You had to guess whose top ten went to who. I found it difficult because I had about fifteen!

Lethal Weapon is certainly one of them. **Goldfinger, Superman, Terminator, Road Warrior, Empire Strikes Back, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Back To The Future** and **Carnal Knowledge.**

FOUR COLOR: Tying this into your career, what sort of movies have influenced your work?

MAGUIRE: This is going to sound funny but I have to say **Road Runner** cartoons. To me, the funniest parts of those movies weren't the situations that Wile E. Coyote got in as much as the face he had when he knew he got in it. Like he always had this look of like, "Oh my God," just before he was about to fall off a cliff and that would kill me. That I thought was funny

I guess that makes me think consciously of what a person's face should look like when they're in a certain situation and try to make it more interesting than just the standard "grit your teeth."

FOUR COLOR: Are there any actors or film-makers that influence your work?

MAGUIRE: I don't know about influence but I do have directors I like. George Miller, Richard Donner, Steven Spielberg and all those. A lot of times if I'm just drawing a standard character it ends up looking like Sean Connery. When I was a kid I used to draw Sean Connery all the time

FOUR COLOR: Aside from Sean Connery, do you pattern any characters on other actors? In **Justice League #2**, there's a character that looks somewhat like Sam Neill

MAGUIRE: Yes. I don't physically try to make them look like anybody, except for that instance. But there are people I have in mind when I'm doing certain characters. I think of Blue Beetle as a cross between Bruce Willis and Michael Keaton. I figure you have to have a real wild sense of humor to dress up in a costume like that. I mean Batman does it because he is trying to threaten people. Buy why would Beetle dress up in these yellow eyeball things? You've got to be a little goofy.

I think of Robert Hays when I do Mr. Miracle. Guy Gardner is his own personality so no one can be him.

By David Caruba and Brandon Twine

7

FOUR COLOR: Did you come up with Guy Gardner's haircut?

MAGUIRE: No, that was given to me. I had **nothing** to do with that!

8

FOUR COLOR: Do you approach comics the way a cinematographer does film?

MAGUIRE: Yes. Every time I do a comic I think of it as a movie. It is telling a story through pictures. I always think of the characters as actors and try to get more performance out of them with body language and facial expression. I try to create a mood with light

9

FOUR COLOR: How long do you plan to work in comics?

MAGUIRE: I don't know. If I go for the rest of my life with that, it would be fine. I wouldn't be miserable. But there are other things I wouldn't mind doing. I wouldn't mind making movies. I've noticed everyone in comics thinks that way too.

10

FOUR COLOR: Do you see yourself moving into films?

MAGUIRE: I'd like to. I'm not the most aggressive person in the world. I'm more laid back than I guess I should be. So I'm not always out there trying to get a film job. I just sort of fall into things. Like I fell into this.

11

FOUR COLOR: In what capacity would you be interested? As a director?

MAGUIRE: Actually, I think I'd like to be a director. If I ever came to that situation I'd also like to watch people direct several movies. I know it's a very difficult job and certainly not something you walk into doing.

12

FOUR COLOR: Do you read comics?

MAGUIRE: Not really. I used to when I was a kid.

13

FOUR COLOR: So what brought you into the comics field after high school?

MAGUIRE: It's the only thing I wouldn't mind drawing. Anything else would be sort of boring for me. It is the closest thing to film other than just doing film story boards. In that way it interests me.

14

FOUR COLOR: Was it difficult as an artist without a comics background to adapt to a comics style, especially one with so many characters?

MAGUIRE: Well yes – it still is – difficult, when I used to draw, I used to draw people. So doing a **Justice League** is no problem except with backgrounds. I really never drew landscapes and things like that so I have to get into the habit of doing more. And there is also understanding of how to get more out of a panel by the way the characters are placed. I'm trying to learn everything.

15

FOUR COLOR: Do you view the field as an artform or as a job?

MAGUIRE: For me it's a job. Every time I do something, however, I do the best I can. For me, it's just to entertain people who buy it. I'm happier that someone would pick it up and say, "I really enjoyed this. This lightened me up for ten minutes." That I like. That's, I guess my goal.

16

FOUR COLOR: Do you see yourself experimenting and expanding your style?

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MAGUIRE: Yes. I don't want to be stuck in one groove. Right now, though, I'd just like to get all the basics down and learn how to make my art effective within the current standards before I can start changing those standards.

17

FOUR COLOR: Do you enjoy working on DC's flagship title, the **Justice League?**

MAGUIRE: Yes, I guess I do. I wish there were more women in it. I'd like to have more than one woman in the book. And I wish Black Canary had a sexier costume. I do plan to design a new costume but I have to wait until after the Green Arrow mini-series is through

18

FOUR COLOR: What sort of references did DC provide you with when you started **Justice League?**

MAGUIRE: They just gave me **Who's Who** pages and whatever was on hand. That's why I drew Mr. Miracle wrong the first time. You see how the yellow part of his mask goes all the way around? Well, it really shouldn't. But the reference they gave me, the guy drew it going all the way around.

19

FOUR COLOR: What exactly is your working relationship with Keith Giffen?

MAGUIRE: He comes up with the plot and draws the little breakdowns. I do it up. His breakdowns aren't that detailed – a figure marked "Bats" if it's Batman and "Miracle" if it's Mr. Miracle.

20

FOUR COLOR: Does he give you much freedom?

MAGUIRE: Yes. He said it himself, "This isn't a bible. If you want to change something around, go right ahead." I imagine he is not the sort of writer who types everything out when he is coming up with a plot. It makes it easier for me, easier for him, easier for everybody.

21

FOUR COLOR: Don't you lay out your own fight scenes?

MAGUIRE: Lately, in the last couple of issues. It is more like Keith hates doing the fight scenes and I like doing the fight scenes. It's a mutual compromise. When I used to make little 8mm films, they used to always be fight scenes. I always tried to make them interestingly choreographed.

22

FOUR COLOR: Will you be taking over all the breakdowns soon?

MAGUIRE: I don't know when. When it happens, it happens.

23

FOUR COLOR: Do you have any input into the stories?

MAGUIRE: I try to throw a little in there if something really irks me. There was something with Captain Marvel that was absolutely childish. He did something where he got really mad and stormed off. I said, "Wait a minute. What's the **S** for? It's for Shazam. It's for Solomon. It's for wisdom." He wouldn't be running off like a baby like that. DeMatteis backed me up on that because it is not the way the character should be.

24

FOUR COLOR: Would you prefer to ink your own work?

MAGUIRE: Not right now. It takes me long enough just to pencil it. If I sat down for eight hours a day, it wouldn't be that bad. But ... that's the problem.

I went a year ago from not drawing at all to having to draw eight hours a day, five days a week. I haven't really gotten into that swing yet but I am getting better. I'm hoping by the time I'm done with the **Justice League** I'll be able to sit down eight hours a day and do my work.

25

AND, JUST BETWEEN YOU AN' ME, MZ. M... DOC FATE GIVES ME THE WILLIES!
NICE SHIP! WONDER HOW MUCH IT COST...
I THINK HE'S SUPPOSED TO
I HOPE MARVE'S ALL RIGHT--
IF HE'S NOT...IT'S HIS OWN FAU..T.
YOU'RE TOO HARD ON HIM, BATMAN
I'M HARD ON EVERYONE.
GOOD POINT.

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FOUR COLOR: What do you think of the people who have been inking your work?

MAGUIRE: I seem to be pretty lucky in that aspect in that I haven't had anybody who's a butcher. I've seen people who pencilled tightly, done nice stuff and had their work inked like it was done on a bus.

26

FOUR COLOR: How long will Al Gordon be inking?

MAGUIRE: I think he's under contract to do twelve issues. That's what Keith, Mark and I are under. What happens after that I don't know

27

FOUR COLOR: Are there other comics you'd like to do, aside from the **Justice League?**

MAGUIRE: There are a couple of characters I wouldn't mind tackling. I wouldn't mind doing the Hawkman. I like that because its basis and thrust are male/female companions. I wish they'd put Superman in the **Justice League.** I wouldn't mind doing him.

I wouldn't mind doing Black Widow (from Marvel). Submariner I like and Dr. Strange also.

28

FOUR COLOR: What about Silver Surfer?

MAGUIRE: After seeing the book I was so envious because each page had only one figure with the background being space. This is as opposed to **Justice League** where one page has six panels with seven characters per panel.

29

FOUR COLOR: If there was a **Justice League** movie to be made now, who would you like to see as actors and actresses?

MAGUIRE: Robert Hayes as Mr. Miracle, Michael Keaton as Blue Beetle, John Glover from **52 Pickup** would be a perfect Guy Gardner, Captain Marvel is a tough one – Doug Barr from the **Fall Guy,** Theresa Russell as Black Canary, David Rappaport as Oberon, Nick Mancuso from **Knight Rider** has the perfect jaw for Batman and Richard Moll, the guy from **Night Court,** would be right for the Martian Manhunter.

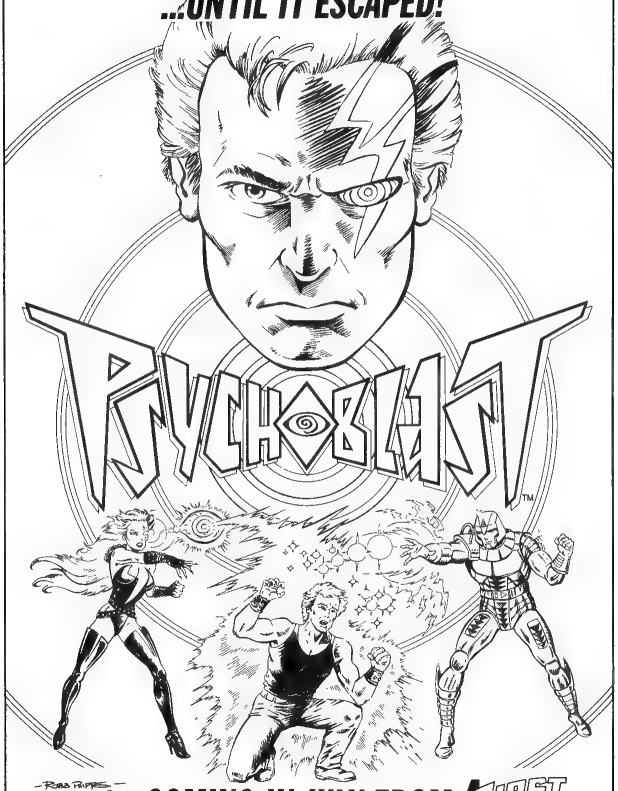
30

FOUR COLOR: How has working in the comics industry affected your life?

MAGUIRE: I can buy nicer clothes now! Financially, it is extremely great. If I could sit down and do eight hours a day, then I'd really be doing o.k.

FC

HE THOUGHT IT WAS ALL IN HIS MIND
...UNTIL IT ESCAPED!



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MOEBIUS

(continued from page 35)

Moebius' feel for the potential of science fiction as a genre has led to his production design work for the films **Alien** and **Tron.** He is currently working on a top secret film project with Ron Howard and George Lucas. His cinematic flair has carried over to his artwork in terms of his framing.

"I think it's because my culture is very deeply involved in movies," Moebius said, adding that it was not a conscious adaptation of cinematic technique but more of an absorption.

Interestingly enough, it is often mentioned that the French have high regard for the films of Jerry Lewis, so much so that the comedian received **Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres.** This is France's highest award for cultural and artistic achievement, similar to the knighthoods bestowed upon British actors. Moebius was given this same high honor by the president of France in 1985.

MOEBIUS AT MARVEL

With such a deep commitment by the artist to his craft, Marvel will have to match that in their production values for the new series of graphic novels. Fortunately, the Epic line has a strong reputation for quality work. Goodwin cited **Moonshadow** and **Elektra: Assassin** as posing production challenges, the former because of Jon Muth's wispy watercolors and the latter for Bill Sienkiewicz' use of mixed media.

"We're working from film," Goodwin said, "so we'll be governed to a certain extent by what we can get from the film. The interesting thing about this series will be the range and variety of his work."

Lofficier noted that the creative control held by Moebius' company extends all the way to the approval of the press run. If a batch of books comes off the press that Starwather's people judge to be poor quality, they will be destroyed. Lofficier hastened to add that such a thing is a very remote possibility and that Marvel should be producing exemplary editions.

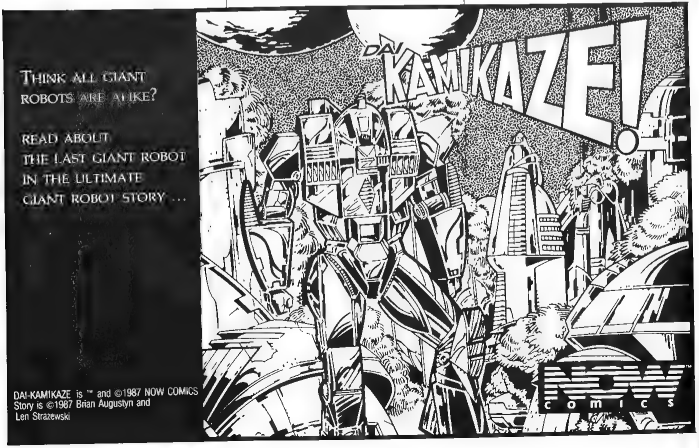
One reason will be Moebius' involvement in the coloring process, especially since many of these stories will be printed in color for the first time. Moebius designs the entire page for color coordination, not just within panels, again showing his technical training and mastery. He gives color keys from a chart and still fixes small details himself before approving a page. Such attention is important as adding color to stories that previously had none means adding new emotional signals and a new level of storytelling that requires the storyteller's hand.

This storyteller in fact tells something about himself through the choice of his now legendary pen-name of Moebius. In mathematics, a Moebius Strip is a representation of warping space through inventive geometry. A strip of paper is given half a twist and then joined at the ends. It becomes a continuous loop. The inside leads to the outside which leads back to the inside.

"I had read that word in science fiction stories," Moebius said, noting that he was focusing on the idea of warping space into other dimensions. "I was fascinated by the concept and by the sound of it."

Now the work of Moebius can warp space and time in the imaginations of a whole new generation of readers through English language editions that will finally do him and his visions justice.

F.C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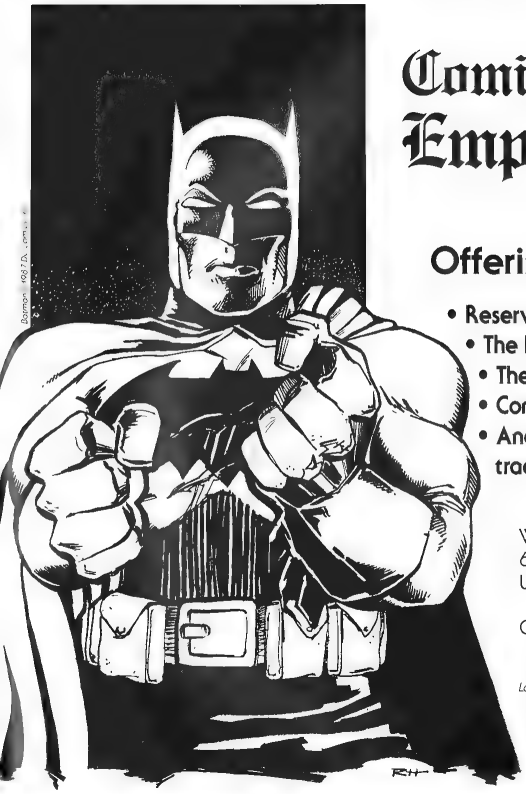

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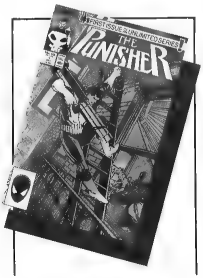
in review

Welcome to the "In Review" section of **Four Color Magazine.** We'd like to take a moment and explain our reviewing policies. Titles reviewed are chosen by our regular review staff from those available at direct sales outlets. Publishers wishing to submit advance copies of titles should send them to the editor-in-chief of **Four Color.** Advance copies must include the cover for reproduction. Submitted issues are randomly assigned to reviewers.

Four Color invites readers to submit their opinions of titles reviewed and matters addressed in this section. Essentially, **your** opinions of **our** opinions will make up a dialogue page that will be enjoyed by fellow readers and professionals in the comic book industry.



Crime and Punishment

Mid-March. A gray, rainy day. I'm bored. And cranky. Marvel Comics, entertain me. That's an order.

Punisher #1. Mike Baron. Klaus Janson. Tough stuff. There are 14 ways I can review this comic. Two of them are stupid. I opt to begin the review with a mindless aping of the tone of the captions in this book.

It's an ugly way to make a living, but it's my job. I'm a comic critic. I may not be the best in what I do, but I work cheap.

To tell the truth, I wasn't really overwhelmed with this first issue in the Punisher's "unlimited series" at first reading. Face it, the Punisher's been treated as a real looney-toon psycho-vigilante in his past few appearances (most recently in the "Gang War" storyline in **Amazing Spider-Man,** where he was willing to blow away anyone and anything that stood between him and his quarry). I figured Baron, an old hand at handling looney-toon and/or obsessed types (i.e. Badger and Nexus), would provide a new twist to the character.

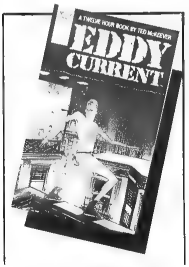
No. Sorry. The character's been turned back into an Executioner type of hero. You might not agree with the Punisher's methods, but he's needed out there to take care of the scum that's preying on all of us decent, upstanding people. Once you get that out of the way, you discover that Baron's delivered a taut little action-thriller set in a very black-and-white world. The villains in the book are true scum, with no redeeming values at all. (They do, however, get great lines, as during a torture session, a Bolivian drug importer gets to comment, "I love America. Electricity right from the wall, anytime you want it.") The tough guy narration, annoyingly reminiscent of Miller's **Dark Knight** at first, is merely following hard-boiled detective tradition, reaching back to Chandler and Spillane.

Also reminiscent of **Dark Knight** is Klaus Janson's art. Hardly surprising, as Janson's links helped lend Miller's vision of Gotham City a gritty **bande-noir** feel. Here he does the whole art job (including colors), and the result is new heights of grit and grime (you want to wash after reading).

Comparisons are unfortunate, but expected. The genre of "Hard-boiled costumed hero" is relatively new, and there aren't too many entrants in the field. If you like **Batman, Daredevil,** or **Vigilante,** you should definitely give **Punisher** a try and judge it on its own merits. And on its own merits, it's not bad at all.

The Punisher spends most of this issue tracking down cocaine dealers (with nary an innocent bystander getting killed). Next issue, he goes after the supplier. Wonder how gritty it gets in the jungles of Bolivia. . . .

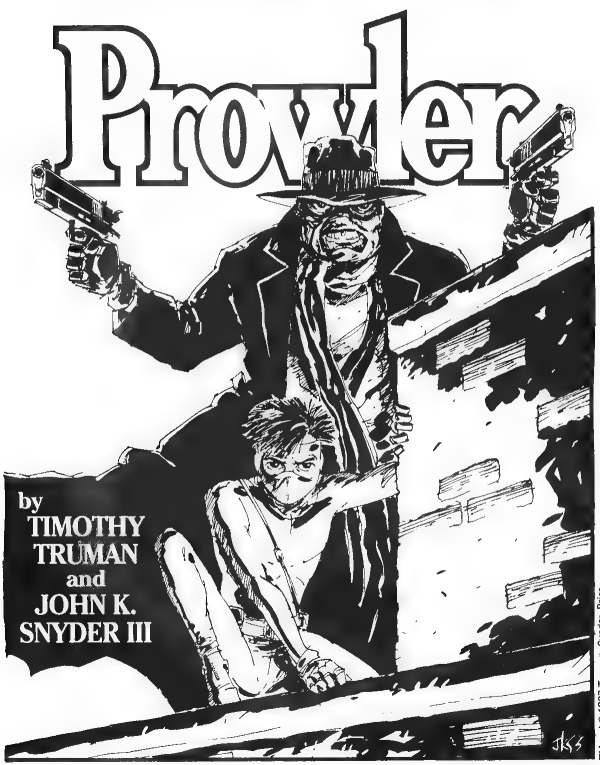
—Jeff Kapalka



Dynamic Fusion In A Twelve Hour Book

Eddy Current, a new comic by Ted McKeever published by Mad Dog Graphics, is the kind of story that gets attempted in comics a lot lately but is

IN THE CITY OF BLOOD AND MAGIC ...ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN



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COMING MONTHLY FROM ECLIPSE

almost never satisfactorily pulled off. The title features an inversion of the typical super hero origin story, where the most unlikely "real-life" character imaginable becomes a costumed crusader, trying to bring comics' crimefighting style to the real world. One of the main reasons that the previous books that have tried this blend of reality and comics have failed is they either go for laughs and then provide none, or they try for drama and wind up being unintentionally hilarious. McKeever's book, by and large, avoids both pitfalls while acutally accomplishing both goals – athough there is a serious, creepy edge to the story, it's also pretty fresh and funny.

The five-page prologue that begins the book is terrific; in fact, it may be the best parody yet of the average comics fan's daydream of turning into a super hero, made all the funnier by McKeever's hero being an inmate of an insane asylum. In his heroic fantasy, Eddy Current wants to be a muscle-bound super-guy so he can shush people in movie theaters with greater authority and help senior citizens cross the street with a super-powered drop-kick. The sequence sets up the main story perfectly, where a power outage and riot at the asylum allow Eddy to escape into the real world for twelve hours, leaving him free to try out the new "Dynamic Fascist" suit he ordered from an ad in a comic. Unfortunately, the suit's electrical powers also seems to deliver some unhealthy zaps to poor Eddy's already-frazzled mind, making him both dazed and dangerous.

McKeever has his story well in hand, and his writing and drawing skills are both impressive, although perhaps a bit too unorthodox for hardcore super hero fans. What his art might sometimes lack in polish and sophisication is compensated for by energy and originality. His sense of humor in regards to his material is almost perfect. Every joke works, but McKeever never allows the jokes to overwhelm the story, a failing of too many hero-oriented cartoonists.

I'm not quite certain where McKeever and **Eddy Current** are going with future issues since the series is billed as "a twelve hour book" (referring to the length of time of Eddy's temporary and impromptu release from the asylum) I can't imagine that there are plans for dozens of installments. I'm very intrigued by the first issue, though, and if the series continues to build on its opening episode I'll be staying with **Eddy Current** right up to the end, whatever it might be.

–Steve Monaco

Little Help For New Retailers

When talking in general terms, a problem that any book on business suffers is what specific information can be applied to a given business.

In dealing with a specific type of business, the problem lies, not so much in what information specifically applies, but to what extent should the author go in communicating that information to make it useful.

A little information sometimes can be as detrimental to the growth of a business as none at all.

A good deal of the information contained within **Help...For New Retailers: Your GUIDE On How To Start A Successful Comic Business** is unintentionally misleading, blatantly self-serving and too watered down to be of much serious value.

Published by one of the leading distributors in the country, Bud Plant Inc., this booklet, written by Mike Smith, former retail advisor to the company, is supposed to serve as a springboard for a complete manual on comic retailing in the future. My hopes are, if this is even an outline for the manual, that the author will go into much more depth.

Let's set aside the spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Let's even ignore the testimonies that sounded like anything but unsolicited.

My assumption is that this booklet was written more as a marketing tool for Bud Plant Inc., rather than a resource of valuable information for the novice retailer. The points the articles touch upon, although reasonably valid to the profession in general, are sometimes vague and always too brief to have a lasting impact. If the reader takes this as a **small** step in starting a store and delves into the points at which this booklet hints with a more serious effort (i.e. legitimate business publications, in depth talks with other retailers, market research, the S.B.A., etc.) then it has been of some use.

The objection is that too many people who open up stores don't know the first thing about retailing or marketing and, if they use a "Dick and Jane" approach as the basis to get that information, they will end up making far too many mistakes in the short run and, as a result, may not make it in business in the long run. Potential retailers **must** do their homework.

Let me point out some specific problems with this booklet:

1.) In "Current Comic Accounts," a statement is made that has the potential to do more damage than any other single statement in the entire booklet. "If you are just starting up in comics, we can provide you with special assistance in setting up your store **to make money from the start,"** (emphasis mine).

Not only is this statement totally ir responsible, but it is not even possible! It takes months, and in most cases, years, to actually start turning a profit in a business. And this is under the most favorable of circumstances! This statement, along with the cute illustration on the cover of a man at a cash register raking in all sorts of money, is very misleading at best, and a gross exaggeration

2.) The only real information contained in the chapter on "Types of Products Available" is what Bud Plant, Inc. specializes in. It gives little information on how to order the products or the unique problems each product category presents. For instance, to support any type of significant business in Japanese animation products, the store better be located in a city of substantial size. Those products are of limited appeal and can be very expensive to inventory. And posters present problems of display space and are prone to

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damage, making them unsaleable.

This is not to say that a store should not stock these items. But there is much more to consider than just Bud Plant, Inc. saying it sells well.

3.) "Picking a Location" contains a popular misnomer, specifically, advising to pick ". . . a good spot near a university." A university locale is not necessarily a good location for a comic retailer. What the author fails to mention is that some colleges and universities are isolated from the general population and that, although the college market **is** a good target audience for advertising, to depend on it exclusively is not a wise business decision in regards to a comic shop. During prime selling periods as Christmas and summer, the store that depends too much on the college student will find its business dramatically dropping. One should locate near a university or college only if the area has a large enough populaton during the breaks to support the store.

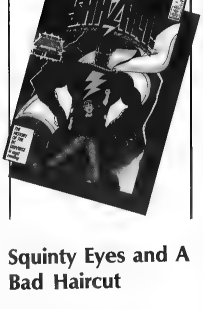
4.) The section on preparing a news release, courtesy of the **Comics Buyer's Guide,** is handy for the mechanics, but it presupposes that the author of said press release is articulate and a good writer. Nowhere in the article does it indicate the importance of making the release grammatically correct or interesting, two things one should always remember if it is being sent with the expectation of publication. The store owner is not always the best person to author a press release.

5). In regards to "Ordering New Comics," the author admits, "More retailers go out of business from overstocking than for any other reason." This is indeed an understatement, one that should be reiterated regarding the sidelines Bud Plant, Inc. handles. There is not enough emphasis on caution in ordering! New sidelines that don't sell is just as much a drain as new comics that don't.

It is not my intention to pick nits. There are some articles, given a bit more education, that could prove helpful and informative. Smith outlines some interesting thoughts on magnet businesses, competition and store layout, as well as a few good topics in "Important Points to Remember." There are some good things being said within some of the articles written by others on cycle sheets and games. But a few good points does not make a book on business worthwhile.

It would have been of much greater benefit to publish a book with more meat rather than an anemic booklet that suffers from poor organization and not enough information. If the intention of the booklet was to inform the novice retailer of Bud Plant's role in the comic industry, then it has succeeded. But if the intention was to enlighten and inform the novice of the intricacies of running a direct sales outlet, of the dangers and responsibilities of entering into one's own business, then it has miserably failed. Better to let one go on wishing to make a living as a comic retailer than leaving the impression that it is as easy as this.

—Bob Gray
Owner
Twilight B & G Emporium



Squinty Eyes and A Bad Haircut

To be read in the manner of Ian Shoales, as heard on National Public Radio (i.e. **real fast**).

I used to like Captain Marvel, the **real** one, the Big Red Cheese. There was something. . . .reassuring in the fact that the World's Mightiest Mortal was a happy, friendly neighbor kind of guy, the kind of guy that you could trust to baby-sit your kids or save the universe, as the occasion demanded. Roy Thomas remembers that guy. Too bad he's not allowed to **write** about him.

No, times have changed and the youth of America can't handle fun super heroes. Super heroes have to be real nowadays, they've got to have problems. Yeah, right. I know **I'd** much rather prefer to be rescued by a whining neurotic slob rather than a happy-go-lucky hero. But I digress.

Shazam! The New Beginning is DC's new version of Captain Marvel. A post-crisis Captain Marvel. One who never was around in the Golden Age of Comics, one who never palled around with talking tigers or beat up on smart alec worms. My reaction is, why bother? Oh, sure, Thomas gives it the old school try, combining Cap's origin, the introduction of Uncle Dudley, Sivana **and** Black Adam, while tying the whole thing up with **Legends** (a kind of after-the-fact **Legends** prelude), but where's the fun? Where's the whimsey of the Captain Marvel that **should've** survived the Crisis? Do we really **need** to have the new Sivana be responsible for Billy Batson's parents' death **and** be a blood relation? Was there any reason to turn Uncle Dudley Batson from a lovable fraud to a responsible guardian?

Oh, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, well, what about Alan Moore? Didn't he revamp a dippy, fun super hero into a realistic exploration of the nature of super heroics in the "real world" and didn't you love it?

Yes, I did. So? Sorry to burst your balloon, gang, but I don't get **my** kicks from comparing apples and oranges. Look, **Miracleman** (nee **Marvelman)** might have started off as a C.M. knock-off, but there's a prime difference between the Man and the Captain. Miracleman, in **his** world is practically one-of-a-kind, a lone god, the odd-man out. Switch him into the real world and you've got the makings of an epic drama. Captain Marvel's just another super-guy in a whole legion of super heroes (to coin a phrase) on Earth DC. Holy Moley, pals 'n gals, what's the point of fosting off another muscle-bound geek on a world glutted with spandex crusaders if you take away what makes him unique? The original Captain Marvel might have been silly, but he had wit, panache, a sense of style. **This** Captain Marvel has squinty eyes and a bad haircut.

I haven't talked must about Tom Mandrake's art on this series because I like Mandrake's stuff. As long as he's doing stuff that fits his style. GrimJack. Batman. That sort of thing. But just

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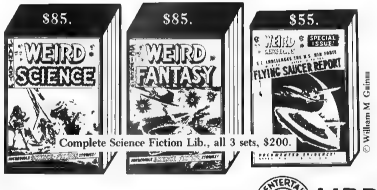

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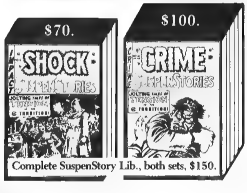

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take a look at the cover of **Shazam!, etc.** #4. That's not Capain Marvel. That's his evil twin. I don't want to read about Captain Marvel's evil twin. There are just too many evil twins in pop culture today anyway.

Maybe Thomas and Mandrake ought to take a look at the Captain Marvel that's appearing in **Justice League.** Now **there's** a Cap that's closer to the mark. Sure, he might be a little on the naive side there, but any super hero who wants to while away the hours on a transoceanic trip by getting the world's greatest heroes to sing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," is all right by me.

Oh well, here's to the memory of Mary, Freddy, Mr. Tawny and the rest of the gang who wisely stayed in retirement, of Saturday afternoons and of more innocent times when comics were fun and hero wasn't just a four-letter word.

—Jeff Kapalka

Two European Masterpieces

I have to admit I'm a member of the small faction of serious comics readers who are unimpressed by the current media coverage of today's "serious" comics. As Harvey Pekar said so well in a recent issue of **The Comics Journal**, the current creative revolution in comics that magazines like **Rolling Stone** and **Newsweek** have been touting is no such thing: Far from any kind of creative upheaval, comics are more mired in the simple-minded genre stuff than ever before. I agree. The new "adult" comics that have been so newsworthy of late consist mainly of new clothes on the same old carcass. If Chaykin's **The Shadow** is mature, sophisticated material, then so is **The Terminator.**

With this kind of hype so pervasive these days, it's so nice to be able to check out comics from other parts of the world, where a genuine adult perspective has flourished for years. Two recent books from Catalan Communications, Pratt and Manara's **Indian Summer** and **Hungarian Rhapsody** by Vittorio Giardino demonstrate the breadth and depth of story and theme the Europeans bring to their comic books, as well as a level of comic art seldom equalled in the American comics market.

Hungarian Rhapsody by Giardino is a period piece, a realistically-rendered spy story set in Budapest and Paris in 1938. The work is very low-key and atmospheric, both in the art and in the writing. While Giardino's story has a hero in the main character Max Friedman, his protagonist's reluctance and subtlety are closer to that of the hero in a novel by Graham Greene than your average comics detective (the book even opens with a quote from one of Greene's books). The plot involves Hitler's imminent invasion of Austria and a race to find the secret that could stop it. As the story unfolds, Giardino fills his pages with a variety of interesting and engrossing characters as good as those in any spy film.

Giardino's main strength is his artwork, which strikes a near-perfect balance between cartooning and realistic illustration. His characterization work is excellent and his backgrounds are wonderful, fully and imaginatively detailed scenes of a time and place not utilized in most comic work that reaches our shores. The coloring is superb, as well. The writing is less captivating, only because of an overly-complicated plot and too many wordy sequences. Still, the writing is much more literate and adult than most domestic comics work and there are enough exciting individual scenes to compensate for the slow stretches. In a way, **Hungarian Rhapsody's** subtlety is a nice change from American's comics overblown melodrama, and there are few cartoonists anywhere who can make a page teem with life as well as Giardino does in the book's best passages.

Even more ambitious than Giardino's book is another work recently published domestically by Catalan, Hugo Pratt and Milo Manara's **Indian Summer.** It's a work of epic scope and imagination, unlike anything attempted here (which is ironic, since the setting of the story is the relationship between colonists and Indians in seventeenth century New England). While it's not perfect, Pratt and Manara's book is a remarkable achievement, and should amaze comics fans with its accomplishments.

The story focuses on the impending battle between the colonists and Indians, but any kind of plot summation would lessen the impact of Pratt and Manara's storytelling skills (and for that reason, make sure that you skip the book's introduction by Javier Coma, that is nothing but a floridly-worded synopsis of the story that follows). The story combines traditional comics storytelling with elements of serious historical fiction to create something different and magnificent. Above all, the book creates its own world with real people, with fully-rounded characters developed in both camps, so that the story becomes much more than mad Indians on the warpath. Thanks greatly to Manara's talent, much of the character revelation in the work is often achieved through pages of totally wordless sequences. These pictures-only scenes are the book's best moments and Manara's skill at depicting facial expression and body language shines most in these passages. Pratt's scripting is well paced, too, perhaps even better than his sometimes static and too-wordy solo strip **Corto Maltese.**

There are some things about the book I'm not crazy about. While more serious in intent than Manara's better-known work, there are still some scenes of gratuitous soft-core porn that seem ludicrous in context and the book's resolution is pretty weak and abrupt. Also, the book's coloring is nothing special, a disappointment considering the scope (and the $17.95) of the book, especially compared to the fine coloring in Giardino's book.

But **Indian Summer** is still a stunning achievement, and Catalan deserves praise for bringing comic work like this to the American market. Both **Indian Summer** and **Hungarian Rhapsody** are excellent examples of the kind of stretching that really can be

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–Steve Monaco

Surf Sans Turf

The **Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy** has this to say about the vastness of space: "Space, is big. Really big. You just won't believe how vastly hugely mind-bogglingly big it is. I mean, you may think it's a long way down the road to the chemist, but that's just peanuts to space," and so on.

I was reminded of that passage from Douglas Adams' cult classic novel as I began to read **Silver Surfer** #1. The double-sized introductory issue begins with not one, not two, but three (count 'em, three) pages of nothing but stars. And rocks. And captions that tell us that "Space is infinite!" Several times.

Luckily, as with the **Guide**, Steve Englehart's style settles down a bit and it gets down to telling you things you really need to know. In this case, re-acquainting us with the character of Norrin Radd, Surfer to the stars.

As the action begins, the Surfer is engaged in his endless quest to pierce the barrier that great Galactus imprisoned him behind, lo, these many months ago.

Anyway, the Surfer's burnt a hole in the ozone layer, hoping that he can latch on to more of the ambient energies of the cosmos. Hopefully enough to get him through the barrier. It doesn't work, but it does result in the Fantastic Four dropping by (investigating the depletion of the ozone layer). Well, no sooner are greetings exchanged than Norrin is attacked by Tryco Slatterus, Cosmic Elder, living spirit of competition and Champion of the Universe. Seems that he's been sent to stop the Surfer "from disrupting the Skrull contest for cosmic domination–and the casting into slavery of Galactus." Big mistake, Champ. Not only does Norrin clean Slatterus' clock with the power cosmic, but this'd been the first that he'd heard of the Skrull plot. After being beaten, the Champion further explains that the Skrulls are holding Galactus' current herald (and flame!), Nova, hostage. Seems that they want Galactus to consume the thousand worlds of the Kree Empire, thus ending the millennia-long Kree-Skrull War. Tryco was sent to sit on the Surfer because there **is** a way that the Surfer can escape his prison and aid his former master. What way? The Champion does a quick fade before he reveals that little tidbit, but the Surfer is filled with new hope and determination.

After a few pages of retelling the high points of the Surfer's history, Ben Grimm asks if Norrin ever tried to leave earth **without** his board.

That's it! The answer (Simple, once you think of it!)

Englehart is clearly having a fun time with this book. The Surfer's dialogue and the captions are perfect echos of the corny/poetic Stan Lee scripts of yore. Opening up the cosmos to the Surfer was a good idea, as his repeated attempts and failures to get through that darn barrier were getting pretty old. Still, there are indications that Norrin will be paying Earth a visit every now and then. Seems only fitting. Stories about a cosmic surfer **should** have a balance about them.

Let's not slight Marshall Rogers' and Josef Rubinstein's contributions, either. Rogers' angular pencils are nicely rounded out and softened by Rubinstein's inks so that the final result fits snugly between the classic Kirby and Buscema visualizations of the cosmic ho-dad.

Surf's up! Let's catch some waves!

–Jeff Kapalka

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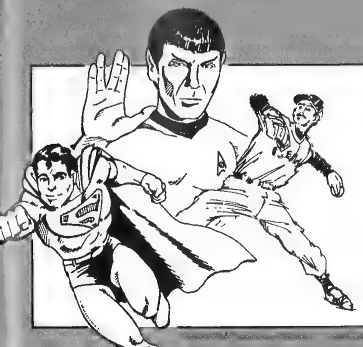

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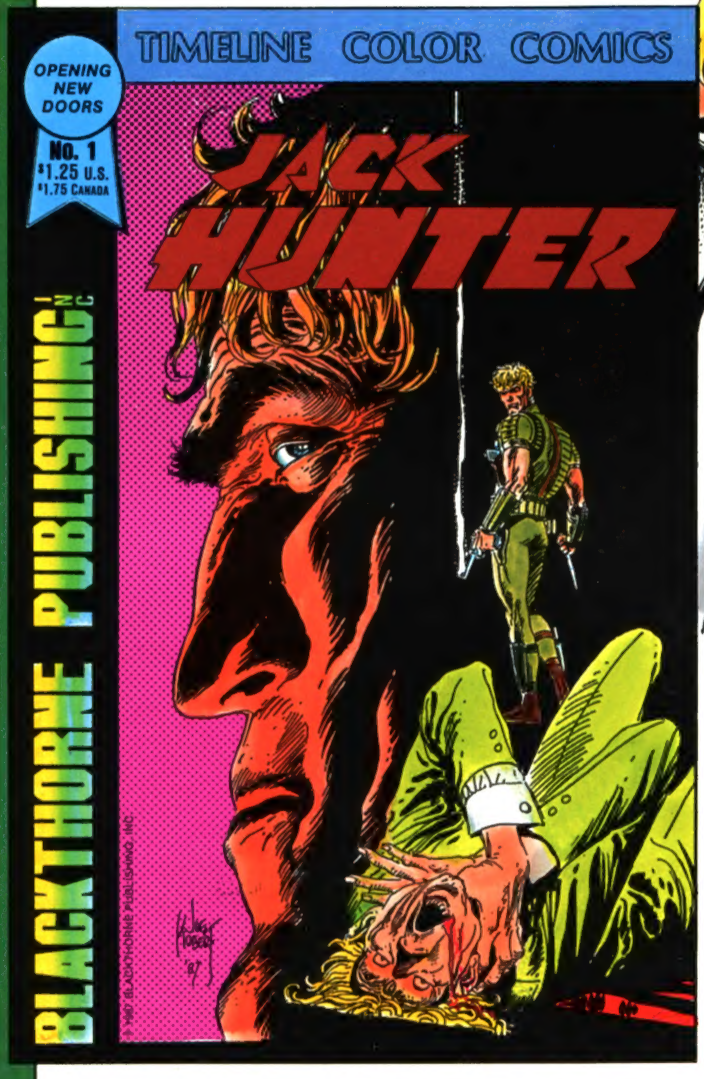

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